

Fountainbridge Canal Initiative

Comments on the emerging Masterplan and the Workshop programme

1 Introduction

1.1 This short report draws together additional comments FCI would like to make on the presented draft Masterplan and the material within the 7N report on the associated Workshop Programme.

1.2 Comments are a reflection of FCI evaluation of the process so far, FCI engagement in the Workshop process and also restate longstanding views and aspirations that FCI has articulated in the past contained in the documents, What's Brewing, The Glasshouse process report, and FCI Initial Comments of the Masterplan process.

1.3 FCI as a group welcomed and supported the Masterplanning Workshop process as a genuine attempt by the Council and its development arm EDI to seek to respond to local community views and aspirations over the redevelopment before rather than after proposals are finalised.

1.4 In further commenting on the draft Master plan proposals FCI indicates where it broadly supports the proposals but more pertinently and hopefully usefully we detail where we believe there are still issues to be resolved or where further work or detail is required to ensure that the Plans really do translate into the joint vision of a viable sustainable local canal-side community.

1.5 Overall FCI feel that the Workshop process was very positive and constructive in engaging community groups in the evolving Masterplanning process. In this respect we felt the Glasshouse event was very useful in setting the scene and enabling a useful dialogue to develop.

We would also comment on the consultation process;

- Better publicity in terms of both quality and quantity would enhance more community participation.(this is difficult we know as many people are now sceptical that they can make a difference)
- Masterplanners would perhaps benefit from “preaching “less and listening more.
- A variety of other forms of consultation could perhaps also be used to supplement public meetings. People seem genuinely interested in the Canal and the future of Fountainbridge. For instance a stall used by the Planners at a previous Canal Festival was very useful in gathering opinions and ideas for the Canal Strategy.
- People are interested in ideas and concepts, place-making for instance, but also want to know something about what’s actually going to happen , when , by whom, and whose going to pay for it. They do not expect chapter and verse but open discussion around such basics builds credibility.

FCI Masterplan Comments

ISSUE	Comments
Mix of Uses	The proposed mix of a variety of uses, school, housing, business, leisure, creative, open space is strongly welcomed.
More Housing?	<p>FCI had suggested a housing component of at least 500 homes for approximately 1000 new residents. The reason for this was to create a permanent “heart” for the community. Also to counter-balance the growing number of existing and proposed “transient” uses such as student accommodations , hotel/apartment hotels, offices, and to some extent the school. There appears to be a growing danger that Fountainbridge would become an “area of transit” with many people coming and going through the area but having no permanent investment in it or loyalty to it. This is already causing problems for example with nearby party flats.</p> <p>It is understood that the current plan includes some 300 homes which we believe may not be enough to create a substantial core of new local residents, we would suggest an allocation of at least 500 homes to even up the live/work/play balance.</p> <p>The Masterplan should also commit itself to the delivery of at least 125 affordable homes (at least 25% of total) to ensure the new community is accessible to everyone in Edinburgh. The Workshop report suggests that” rather than a straight 25% affordable there should be a spectrum of affordability levels”. In our view this appears to be an attempt to water down the commitment on this site to provide affordable homes to rectify the imbalance in the city at the affordable end.</p>

It would also be useful as a community sustainability measure .to identify and produce a balanced housing profile as an key part of the Masterplan from anticipated needs of the broader area in terms of affordability, type ,tenure, special needs, local connections and price . This is much more likely to produce a longer term sustainable community and link the area to surrounding communities than housing based purely on highest price alone.

Creative Quarter

This is an attractive proposal for the site, but it would be useful to understand what this would mean in practice other than a physical linkage between the Printmakers and the prospective Filmhouse. FCI have strongly supported the Printmakers proposal to refurbish the Brewery Offices and they have kept FCI as a local group fully informed and engaged in their proposal. FCI would like to know more about the Creative Quarter concept, how it relates to the Canal Quarter concept and how it will be developed, will it include incubator/small business units, studios, other facilities, how could the school and its facilities be linked in to this?

Filmhouse

This is an exciting idea but there seems no detail. What will the proposal consist of? Will it include training /production facilities? Unfortunately the accompanying visual produced another glass and concrete square box. Is this the vision? How committed are the Filmhouse to this relocation?

In the event of the proposal not going forward what is the proposed use for this very important canalside site?

FCI would like to see the Creative Quarter have a real presence on the canalside as well as the linkage with the Printmakers with room for small studios, incubators, small businesses and crafts to animate the Quayside and the public space north of Leamington Bridge.

Is there any meat behind the concept of a Creative Quarter or is it just another name ? It would be useful for further discussion. What sort of facilities would it need, what activities would it generate , what sort of employment ?

Supermarket

The Masterplan locates a 200m² supermarket with underground carpark and a rooftop garden, with the implication this would be let to a high quality organic retailer with a internal market stall concept. The proposed supermarket which it is assumed is important to the financial package of the development would occupy the prime site on the canalside next to Leamington Bridge.

Supermarkets are not known for their iconic architectural design. Given this is a sensitive site which will help shape the quality and feel of new neighbourhood FCI feels a equally central but less prominent site to the north next to Fountainbridge would be more appropriate? Is there a danger that the key central public space to the south of Leamington Bridge becomes dominated the supermarket forecourt and its associated trolley park? Will the “dead” window space of any supermarket face the canalside or the square side?

Accordingly FCI have concerns over the placing of the new supermarket component and its likely interface with the new main square particularly as there are already two small supermarkets at

Fountainbridge at Edinburgh Quay and Napier. FCI would also like more detail of the likely occupant and the identified internal market element.

Office space

FCI would like to see greater consideration and prominence given to buildings which accommodate small creative/craft businesses and enterprises. Preferably with a prominent canalside location to promote the Creative Quarter concept. This would provide a uniqueness and vibrancy for the area and create a variety of business and employment opportunities. The small business component does not have sufficient weight in the Masterplan. Why not a major purpose built canalside creative industries incubator with small easy in /out spaces developed by the Council /other agencies.

Bank site

It would be useful to know what consultation /discussion has taken place with the owners of the BoS site next door, and whether it will be possible to co-ordinate developments.

School integration

School site/design and Masterplan do not appear well integrated at the junction of Viewforth and the Quayside with a potential bottleneck.. As with rest of the site further detail required over traffic management and separation /resolution of vehicular/pedestrian/cyclist flows and potential conflicts.

Density

FCI broadly support the intended heights and densities as outlined in the visuals. (in contrast to the dreadful outline consent). FCI strongly support the planned open spaces and public spaces. And the creation of a significant open space at Leamington down to Fountainbridge. FCI would support a wider use and variation of density, height and built form to give contrast and views and open aspects throughout the site. Also we have some concerns that the “castle rampart” effect along the

edges of the development could reduce solar gain across the site and block the sun's rays across much of the development. This aspect should be looked at. FCI would also like to see more detail on heights across the site.

Design

FCI is disappointed over the current lack of any building design guidelines which would bring together an overall concept and continuity to the development. There was substantial discussion of design of waterside places at both the Glasshouse event and the Workshops and examples of best practice from around the world presented, yet this is not reflected in this draft. The squarish development blocks are predictable and no attempt as yet to detail a roofscape (other than the unacceptable flat roofs shown on visuals), or indicate possible elevations, detailing, and materials. There still appears to be a schism between the experts and their over appreciation of more modern brutalist architecture styles and the community who wish to see more traditional forms and recognisable features associated with the tenement form and waterside/quayside development.

FCI would like to see an overall design concept developed which gives a real sense of place and continuity, which reflects the human scale, with variation and interest. This has been discussed at the Glasshouse event and in the initial comments on the Masterplan by FCI. This would include the use of pitched roofs and balconies, public and private space and a modern take on the strengths of the tenement form and the nearby traditional urban architecture which serves Edinburgh so well.

With respect to design continuity FCI wonders whether the current lack of design guidance and the square development block format reflects the intention of the Masterplanners to parcel up the site into saleable development blocks? **An indication of how EDI propose to develop out the site might dispel this fear?**

Quayside

FCI strongly support the creation of a major quayside and the open space area and public square at Leamington Bridge. Is the covered arcade along the Quayside a formal proposal from Viewforth to Leamington? Will the line of trees along the quayside be confirmed in the plan?

Public open space

FCI are concerned over the whittling away of open space provision as a result of the expansion of the school site. Accordingly FCI would like to see a clear delineation of the both the public, semi-public and private open space proposed under the Masterplan to resist any further shrinkage of provision.

Clarification is also required as to the size and use of the proposed public park facility in front of the Napier flats and the use and access to the quayside area in front of the new school, and the proposed community access to the schools open space.

Access/circulation

The pedestrian priority and segregation is strongly welcomed, and it is assumed that the majority of the car-parking will be underground and not surface .

It is unclear from the current material how the vehicular circulation and access will work, and how it will interface with both pedestrian areas and cyclists. Is it intended to have shared space and if so where?

FCI strongly support the walkway along the canal and the parts where it will be partially covered. There may be a current bottleneck at Viewforth particularly at school times. At the moment the whole corner at Viewforth and the inter-relationship between the school site and the Quayside may not work.

Waterspace

FCI still feel the Masterplanners are not prepared to grasp the unique opportunity presented to create new operational waterspace for the future, primarily on cost grounds. The unclear Options presented reflect this timid approach.

Option 1 provides non-operational cosmetic linear water features . FCI is not against water “features “as such but not as the cost of a buy-off for operational canal waterspace. It should not be either /or. There is a real poverty of ambition here.

Option 2 seems to provide a very small enhancement of the existing basin (unclear how much ?) to enable double berthing, rather than echelon berthing as suggested by FCI.This seems hardly worth the trouble of realigning the existing towpath, and is nowhere near the 1000m² suggested in the form of a new basin in the Planning policy document, or an increase of about a third to the existing stretch between Viewforth and Leamington.

FCI would take issue with the conclusion that the workshop discussion favoured Option 1. It really is the evil of two lessers here! There were arguments and discussion on both sides and no definitive decision. It is patently clear the Masterplanners are basing their deliberations on cost , and as far as waterspace is concerned .

FCI still favours either a new basin or a significantly enlarged existing basin to enable echelon mooring and some clear feature waterspace in the stretch between Viewforth and Leamington and have already submitted a detailed paper on this, to no response. This would allow boats to be accessed from the new quayside and allow the berthing of say 15-20 boats for commercial/leisure/recreational/tourist use. It would provide a real canalside amenity and feature.

FCI supports the Councils own planning policy on this.

FCI would still like to have a constructive discussion (including realistic costs) about why the Councils own Planning policy is being ignored and the opportunity to enhance the canal quarter missed . New waterspace and moorings have been provided (and supported by Scottish Canals) in Glasgow, Falkirk, Achinstarry,Grangemouth and Linlithgow, why not Edinburgh?

FCI also believe that there is now a clear conflict between the Council as the planning authority and the Council as developer. If the Council as developer won't support its own planning policies why should any other developer?

Community facilities It is assumed that many facilities being provided in the new school will have dual use for the community. Clarification is required concerning what facilities and their level of access.

Given the " tight site" on which the school is built it has become clear that there will be limited space for new activities in the future. FCI would like to see an audit of community facilities available and those which should be provided so that space could be allocated for them if necessary.

General comments received by FCI express scepticism and frustration that many proposed "community benefits" of new development whilst featured prominently on plans fail to appear in practice. Already at Fountainbridge we have seen the loss of the proposed new basin at Tollcross, and the encroachment onto identified open space.

New canal and leisure facilities

Given the lack of space at the new school, FCI would like to see additional community spaces and facilities which will promote and support the canal and canalside recreational activities. This would provide some real community benefit of development. Also such provision would be an investment in the future of the canal as a major recreational and commercial asset to the city.

FCI would like to see a canalside site and /or building reserved for canal and local community related use. This could be developed in partnership with local community groups and providers and provide a hub for local activities both on the water and canalside. FCI has identified real community enthusiasm for such facilities which could be run locally in partnership with the Council. **The idea of a local Community Development Trust could be supported to provide a lever for new resources and develop new community activities and enterprises, it would also act as a community anchor organisation.** FCI has already identified a wide range of initiatives from canoeing to history and heritage, from a local cafe to training and employment initiatives , from a community wellness centre and spa , to a information hub for community, leisure, and tourist information. Such a centre would also be a resource for community and social enterprise activities which would link in strongly with the creative quarter concept.

All these and more could be housed in a new canal centre developed by the Trust. Such a proposal provide the necessary focus for ongoing community empowerment and engagement.

Delivery Vehicle

FCI think it would be useful to know more about the vehicle or method of delivering the development. Will it be directly delivered by EDI or arms length or parcelled out in development

blocks. How will there be ongoing engagement with the new community and how will the Council as Masterplanners ensure that broad brush aims and aspirations are fully carried through to implementation. As indicated elsewhere the community is deeply sceptical of “fancy plans” which come to nothing.

Environment

Whilst the plan is in its early stages , there is as yet no indication that environmental considerations will be built in. **FCI would like to see an action –centred debate and environmental impact assessment for the development now within the Masterplan.** For instance it may be too late to include the school in any district heating scheme, or new building techniques and design could maximise heat/energy efficiency for new homes.

Finances

There is a general feeling that FCI and other groups need not know in depth the nuts and bolts of development finance and the delivery process and should concentrate on supporting the delivery of community aspirations , views, and initiatives.

However It is notable that throughout the Workshop process and the draft Masterplan there is no mention of the implementation process /timescales or of assumptions about costs.FCI believe these are the “elephant in the room” and yet may be guiding decision-making back stage. For instance in the balance between commercial and community facilities or the provision of affordable housing or waterspace.

If the Council/EDI is committed community engagement around regeneration it would be useful to provide as part of the decision-making process at least the key financial drivers of the regeneration process and the key financial assumptions. This will build confidence and credibility . In taking

forward the Masterplan , **FCI would like to see an accompanying financial appendix, identifying resources , investment, anticipated returns, stakeholders and partners.**

Conclusion

FCI supports an “inclusive” incremental approach which will be able to draw in a range of stakeholders and financial resources overtime working towards an ambitious overall vision, under the supervision and control of the Council as a patient and responsible community developer.

