

Fountainbridge: Contribution and comment on the Masterplan development process



Fountainbridge Canalside Initiative

January 2013

Contribution and comment on the Masterplan Development process

Summary

FCI is a local community group who wish to ensure the best value for local communities of development beside the Union Canal in and around Fountainbridge. The ultimate aim being to assist in the creation of a vibrant, new, sustainable canalside neighbourhood in Fountainbridge.

To ensure that FCI reflected the needs and wishes of local people, FCI has engaged in a comprehensive consultation and participation programme, including public meetings, consultations, workshops, Open Days, exhibitions, and subject working groups. This local activity has been summarised in the vision document, “**Brewing New Life**” February 2012 which identified a wide range of ideas and views coming from local people on the shape and content of proposed new development.

To take these ideas forward FCI then organised and funded a Community Design Workshop led by The Glass-House community led design Trust. Participants here not only included FCI activists but a full range of representatives from the potential development stakeholders. “**The Glasshouse Report**” details this unique event and further identified the key elements FCI would like to see in the new development.

Both these documents are attached as background information to this report

The City of Edinburgh Council in partnership with its development arm EDI as owners and prime developer of the bulk of the Fountainbridge site are now completing a new Development Masterplan which will detail, guide, and control how development will evolve on the Brewery site. **This report provides an FCI input and contribution to that important Master planning process**. This input builds on the experience of the participation process detailed above, and clearly identifies the community requirements and needs which FCI believe should be included in the Masterplan.

The report follows a simple format;

- **The key themes or issues** FCI consider important
- proposing a **detailed input** into Masterplan
- Identifying the **impact of the proposal** on the overall vision of a vibrant, sustainable, canalside neighbourhood

Themes

1. Proposed Land Uses
2. Density and Massing
3. Urban Design
4. Social & Community Needs
5. Waterspace
6. Local Economic Development
7. Recreation, Leisure & Tourism
8. Heritage
9. Development vehicle

Theme or Issue: Proposed Land Uses

Masterplan input:

- Masterplan should not include an over-powering or over dominant land use, for instance corporate offices or major retail. Making it a mono-use site.
- FCI would suggest a mixed use site and development which reflects the need to provide space for the new community to live, work and enjoy their leisure time as far as possible within the new neighbourhood.
- FCI would suggest that Student Accommodation (given nearby existing developments) major speculative corporate office development (given likely future demand and recent bulk provision in Fountainbridge area) and retail hyper-market provision are not appropriate uses for the site.
- Within a mixed use plan, FCI could see scope for modest office development and retail space to serve and contribute to, the neighbourhood and surrounding area.
- Given the recent, Napier student complex for 781 places under construction and proposed School development for 1200 pupils on the west of the site, FCI feel there is a clear requirement for a counter-balancing local residential population which would form the permanent heart of the new neighbourhood. A broad target of say at least 1000 new residents is suggested, indicating at least 300 new homes on site, if not more.
- FCI would like to see space for a variety of small businesses and enterprises which would help generate a wide range of local employment. This should include space for small start –ups, incubators, social and community enterprise and third sector organisations which serve the city.
- FCI would like to see wherever feasible both a horizontal and vertical integration of uses. Shops with houses, offices with shops below, houses and workshops that create a vibrant and animated area.
- FCI would like to see significant and appropriate strategic and local open space, including new water space, throughout the development which recognises and enhances the areas Canalside location.

Impact

Mixed use development will contribute directly to the sustainability of the new neighbourhood providing greater opportunities for local people to live, work and enjoy their leisure within the neighbourhood reducing travel/commuting and carbon footprint.

- Mixed use, well balanced, will contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of the neighbourhood, recreating in part the vibrant inner-city communities in Edinburgh which have so often suffered from insensitive and wholesale redevelopment.
- New business sectors such as creative industry, services, food, craft, cultural, tourism and leisure and recreation will thrive in a mixed use environment and represent, under the attractive package of a creative Canal Quarter, the best opportunity to maximise the benefits of the Canalside location to create local jobs.

Theme or Issue: Density and Massing

FCI remains concerned over these two inter-linked and important issues. The Glasshouse Workshop provided a valuable insight here for all participants. There are ongoing community concerns that existing new developments which sit at the interface of the city centre and inner city suburbs are frequently over-developed and have unattractive level of massing due to the need to cram the maximum development of sites with height restrictions. Mention is often made to narrow canyons between glass and concrete boxes. The development of the existing Edinburgh quay and the recent Napier flats do nothing to calm these fears. FCI accept that redevelopment will be urban in nature, but ask that new development should also reflect the sensitivities of surrounding areas and should also allow an area to breathe.

Masterplan input

- FCI feels there is a general acceptance for an overall level of density in this location which reflects the traditional level reflected by the traditional tenemental building form, (that is three/ four storeys, with some at five on corners/frontages etc)
- FCI would not like to see development simply “build up” in a massed form to the “ acceptable” level of height included in the outline application, as is the unfortunate case of the Napier flats.

- FCI would like to see a strong variation of density levels across the site to provide interest and variety and to reflect quality design opportunities and different uses and intensities.
- FCI would like to see in principal lower densities towards the south canalside of the site, with perhaps some higher densities towards the north of the site.
- An exception to this principle would be the creation of a Quayside building line and height along the edge of the enlarged quayside open space which sought to recreate the sense of place, excitement, and enclosure present in successful quayside development of which there are now many good examples.
- FCI would expect to see corresponding lower building densities in the internal areas of the site to reflect different building forms.
- The existing Edinburgh Quay, Springside, Napier flats, and the new School are all consistently high density/massed developments, the remainder of the site will need to provide at least some counter-balance of open space and lower density if the potential quality of the area is not to be lost.
- In land use terms FCI would wish to see the development of an enlarged canalside quayside comprising predominantly of quality open space, in principal at least twice the width of the current quayside.
- FCI would like to see three principle focal points and enhanced public open space and focal points:
 - The site of the proposed canal basin ,in the planning brief to the north east of Viewforth Bridge
 - To the south of Leamington Lift Bridge
 - At the end of the existing Edinburgh quay (adjacent to the RBS owned site)

FCI believes creating a sense of place and impressive quayside will be an investment for the future, and will make the quarter an attractive place both to live and invest in.

Theme or Issue: Urban Design

Given that the Council now own the site ,there is the hope that this gives the opportunity to more closely influence the quality of the design throughout the development and that as such good design will be more of an inherent part of process rather than an afterthought. The Glasshouse event in particular investigated design aspects and the following comments reflect the views of FCI in this area. FCI experienced a strong interest in design from the community both in terms of what they would like to see and what they did not like to see. This site and the Council's ownership and role of the developers, FCI believes gives the Council a great opportunity to involve the community more in the urban design of local communities.

Masterplan input

- FCI would like to see a reflection of Edinburgh traditional tenemental form in some form, albeit a modern take on this.
- FCI feels it is important that there is open space and views across the site at a number of points, in a north/south orientation.
- FCI did not wish to see huge square glass and concrete boxes with flat roofs, forming a high density barrier across the site from east to west, and once again separating the communities to the north and south of the site.
- FCI would like to see strong connections both through the site and from the site to nearby communities, particularly, Tollcross, and Gorgie/Dalry, and Merchiston where connections are currently poor.
- FCI wishes to ensure that the site is sensitively linked with neighbouring communities. Levels of traffic carried by Gilmore Place, Dundee Street/Fountainbridge and the Western Approach create barriers across the east-west axis, and peak-time traffic on Viewforth where it crosses the canal creates a potential risk to pedestrians and cyclists. The configuration of roads, and public transport links, must enhance the development of the Fountainbridge site.
- FCI believe the council as developer could and should influence more closely the quality and type of buildings constructed with a view to creating both a unique sense of place but a best practice model for other regeneration proposals.
- FCI liked roofs, traditional materials, balconies, backcourts, gables, human scale, and defensible spaces.
- FCI would support the development of an iconic quayside, i.e. Grassmarket frontage.
- FCI would like to see iconic buildings or locations which give a strong sense of identity and/or have a wow factor. These could be existing building /structures refurbished like Leamington Bridge or the Rubber Building Offices, a brick built tower with the old Brewery clock on top or structures such as the new school.

Impact

FCI have identified a real thirst both locally and within the wider Edinburgh community to create something really special at the canalside at Fountainbridge. There is little real enthusiasm for current major new developments in the city and a strong feeling of the public's view being ignored and opportunities being lost. Given that the site can now be developed from scratch with a new community there is an opportunity to create something special, an iconic place and new neighbourhood which can be an Edinburgh exemplar of successful regeneration. FCI is convinced that a combination of community engagement and investment, quality design and planning, and realistic and sustainable uses is the key.

Themes or Issue: Social and Community needs

FCI believe any proposed development should both ensure that the needs of local people are addressed with the provision of relevant community facilities.

Masterplan input

- A fundamental requirement identified by local people in the creation of a new neighbourhood unsurprisingly is the provision of affordable housing particularly for young people, start ups and families. A Masterplan should take full cognizance of this requirement and ensure new residential development provides both a range of house prices and accommodation.
- FCI suggest affordable housing should consist of at least 25% of the housing element and that such provision should be balanced between social houses for rent and houses for sale. It is imperative that local people in the area have access to the development to produce a balanced local community.
- FCI also recommend that the Council pursue where possible a range of initiatives to deliver more affordable housing such as self-build, mid-rent, shared equity, or part build. FCI are aware that there is strong support and interest from local housing agencies willing to contribute to the development.
- FCI also suggest that the proposed new school should be identified as a joint use facility with a range of resources being made accessible and usable to the wider community such as IT suite, theatre or gym.
- FCI hope that if an effective new neighbourhood is to be created that appropriate community facilities are identified and programmed into the development process and clearly located within the Masterplanning process.

Impact

Affordable housing is seen as an essential element to any successful regeneration strategy in an area like Fountainbridge.

Provision of affordable housing and community facilities will give local people a real stake in the area increasing the local impact and relevance of the scheme and its long term sustainability.

Theme or Issues: Waterspace

Masterplan input

FCI agree with the existing Development brief, and the Canal Development Strategy drawn up by the Councils Planning Department that the opportunity to provide additional and well located waterspace is a once in a lifetime opportunity not to be missed. The provision of new bluespace will raise the quality of the development and make a clear statement that the Council as developer supports its own planning vision and its aim for place-making and urban design.

Additional water space works both in terms of iconic place making, urban design and quality development, and as a focus for a local economic development, attraction, tourist, and creative hub. FCI is committed to work with the Council and other stakeholders and supporters to enable the vision of a canal quarter with iconic water space at its heart a reality.

- FCI strongly support new water space within a new basin or enlarged basin.
- FCI will work with the Council and Scottish canals to deliver this.
- FCI recognises the unique contribution new blue space will make to place-making and the attraction of the area.
- FCI would like a considered water-related strategy as part of the Masterplan which identifies how new and existing water can be maximised and better accessed for recreation, tourism and business.

Impact

New water space is seen as crucial to creating a special new place which can encourage and sustain waterside activity of all types, providing a vibrant heart of the new neighbourhood and canal quarter. FCI would like to work with all parties to investigate how this crucial vision can still be achieved in the straightened economic times.

Theme or Issue: Local Economic Development

FCI would like the Masterplan to make provision for small business, social and community enterprise and a range of other ways to develop the local economy.

Masterplan Input

- Space allocated for small business and small manufacturing use on site
- Masterplan to retain the Brewery Offices with possible future use as a community hub, educational science centre and /or small business incubator.
- Provision for canalside and canal related business and social enterprise activity within the Masterplan.
- Focal point /iconic buildings or development on the quayside to enhance visitor attraction.
- Space for creative , cultural, craft, and tourist development.
- Consideration given to the provision of training and related employment initiatives either utilising the new school resources or by new initiatives,
- Investigation of potential for leisure and recreation industry development.
- Council to consider investing in incubator and /or easy in /out premises on site to encourage small business and start ups.

Impact

FCI sees the need in order to support a balanced and sustainable neighbourhood for support and provision for a range of local employment creating activities. As well as established uses such as office space, retail and hotels/restaurants, FCI would like the Masterplan to identify pump priming activity and result space which would stimulate home grown small business and enterprise activity.

Theme or Issue: Recreation, Leisure, and Tourism

FCI see the potential for the site with other surrounding sites to form a Edinburgh Canal quarter which would promote the canal and canalside as a major recreational asset for the city as a whole, building on the public investment that has already been deployed through the Millennium Link.

Masterplan input

- Consideration given to creating a range of both formal and informal visitor attractions along the canalside. Including potential leisure and visitor attractions, such as covered markets, further space for canal boats, heritage attractions/museum, urban trails, spas, crafts, arts and exhibition space and iconic visitor attractions.
- Allocation of space and resources to encourage and support existing canal related groups who use the canal, canalboat users , rowers, cyclists and walkers.
- Design criteria within the Masterplan that produces both a sense of place and becomes a visitor /local attraction. A quality urban environment being seen as an investment in the future of the area.
- FCI would like to see the Masterplan evolve through time and drawing on the ideas and interest of groups and businesses in the area. Initial Masterplan should be seen as identifying broad guidelines for future guided organic/phased growth rather than a static prescriptive spatial land use plan.

Theme or Issue: Heritage

During FCI activities considerable interest and support has been shown in the rich heritage of the area, both canal- related and in terms of the rich industrial history of the area including brewing and the wealth of other factories and enterprises which contributed in the past to Edinburgh's prosperity.

Masterplan input

- The Masterplan should retain and refurbish the existing listed building on the site and investigate a range of new future uses for this building , i.e. , community hub ,museum ,arts and creative centre , incubator, artists studios, social enterprise centre, voluntary sector accommodation.
- Consideration should be given to creating a new public space centring on the Leamington Lift Bridge
- FCI would like o see the restoration of the renowned Brewery Clock on the site and the identification of sites for showcasing the heritage of the area and the canal.

Theme or Issue: Development Vehicle

The development vehicle chosen will clearly affect both the form and content of the Masterplan and subsequently how the development rolls out over time.

Masterplan Input

- FCI would prefer a development vehicle which is “inclusive” rather than “exclusive” in nature. That is rather than contract with one developer, which could shut out other interests, a more co-operative approach which seeks to draw in a variety of interests and resources.
- FCI feels an organic, phased vehicle is more likely to be able to maximise the involvement of a whole variety of local stakeholders and investors.

- FCI feel the Council should seek to maintain overall control of the process as a patient developer /investor.
- The council and a range of local stakeholders should seek to develop the site organically over time to both maximise support and develop a mixed and vibrant Canal Quarter.

Impact

Looking at successful examples, FCI feel that a development that grows organically engaging over time with a variety of local interests is more likely to be successful than an ambitious corporate development project which may or may not come to fruition. Accountability and engagement over time with interested parties could provide the added value and local connections which will make the quarter a special place over time.

Conclusion

This short report identifies some of the themes and issues which have arisen through:

- Public consultations and Open Days
- "Brewing New Life" Vision Day Report
- The Glass House Community Design Workshop

FCI has indicated above what broad elements it would like to see in the physical element of development but equally importantly FCI would like to see an evolving Masterplan process which seeks to involve as many stakeholders as possible. An inclusive and responsive Masterplan process will allow a wide range of interested parties to take ownership of and add value to the emerging new sustainable canalside neighbourhood.

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