

Housing on the Fountainbridge site



Discussion Paper for Sounding Board 30/7/2013

1 Introduction

1.1 The overall aim of FCI is to campaign for, promote, and support, the creation of a new sustainable canalside community at Fountainbridge. FCI have articulated both the need for the creation of sustainable balanced community and effective place-making in a number of key documents, namely;

- “Brewing New Life”
- FCI input into the Masterplan
- Report on the Glasshouse event

1.2 All these documents and the detailed discussions and consultations they represent, reflect the importance that is attached by FCI to the pivotal role that the provision of new quality, accessible and affordable housing must play in creating a new canalside community.

1.3 This brief paper is intended to highlight the housing issues in the FCI documents to stimulate discussion at the Sounding Board meeting and hopefully to then influence the contents of the Masterplan and resulting development.

1.4 The housing challenges to be faced can be divided into a number of categories, for ease of discussion, although clearly they are all strongly inter-related with each other and the overall development concept of the Masterplan.

1.5 FCI see the key challenge areas as being;

- **Number of homes to be built** . In order to create a viable new community, and in relation to other proposed uses/competing priorities.

- **Type ,size, and tenure mix of homes.** To create a balanced community which is accessible to all the local community and meets ongoing housing needs.

- **Provision of Affordable homes.** Not just a token corner of the site but across the site creating a balance of local people. Enabling all local people to aspire to finding a home in the centre of the city.

- **Design, layout, and density.** Need to create a unique sense of place and style which reflects the canalside location, reflects its urban location, yet also provides personal and community space and desirable homes of every size and type.

- **Development, management, and ownership challenges.** A key learning outcome from FCI activity, has been that successful new communities are not “developments” with an end date, but evolving, complex, organisms with a wide variety of stakeholders and a clear sense of ownership and participation over time.

2 Number of new homes

2.1 A major and growing concern of FCI is that Fountainbridge, and to an extent parts of Tollcross are becoming areas of major “transition”. We have massive inflows and outflows of people and activity with no real investment in, or commitment to the area as such. The growth of “party” flats and short rent apartment hotels and their disturbance to local residents is an example.

2.2 Add to this the predominance of student accommodation both in the development area, close by, and in the Tollcross area generally suggests to us there is a strong need to restore a balanced community and to inject new heart into the area. FCI firmly believe that there should be no further apartment hotels or new student residences and the priority should be to create at **least 600 new homes in the area** for local people across both development areas, the Council and RBS site.

2.3 In creating new homes, a clear objective should be to create a balance of size, type, price, and tenure which reflects the city’s housing needs. **Masterplans which do not recognise the need to reflect the wider community needs of the area in terms of sustainable community development and the provision of a range of new homes should not be accepted.** FCI would like to see a very robust planning stance whereby the local community see a significant share of the benefits from new development.

3 Home type, size and density.

3.1 If sustainability, social cohesion, and effective regeneration are to be taken seriously, the profile of the new homes provision should reflect the needs of the local community and provide a range of homes which reflect community diversity. The site is an attractive one close the town centre and the danger will be that developers will seek to maximise their returns by providing a bulk of up market one/two flats.

The Council site should seek to set a good example of place- making by identifying a suitable range of new homes following community consultation, including homes accessible for young people, older people, people with a disability, shared homes, etc. Again and again FCI hear that young local families cannot get a start on the housing ladder in Edinburgh. The loss of families from central Edinburgh makes it harder to achieve sustainable communities. It increases social polarisation, if the centre becomes the preserve of higher income groups and increases commuting and traffic congestion as most jobs will continue to remain in central urban areas.

A mix of larger apartments and houses should be available so that young couples can remain as their family grows. The nearby Tollcross Primary school- currently being re-furbished - and the planned High School provide immediately accessible local education for local children. Children walking to school will reduce traffic congestion and pollution levels.

The RBS site should also be expected to reflect these needs within their own site and not seek to siphon off the more profitable uses, leaving community needs unmet.

3.2 FCI recognise that the site is principally an urban one and that housing density is likely to reflect this. On balance FCI would favour a new take on the successful traditional tenement or colonies form. However FCI would not support un-relieved density in block formation marching across the site. There must be variation, open space, design, and contrast if the area is to remain attractive in the long term.

This theme of short term gain versus long term commitment comes up again and again. FCI would support stakeholders who are in it for the long term and are patient investors and who wish to build and maintain a vibrant prosperous place both now and in the future.

4 Affordable and Accessible Homes

4.1 Given the current economic climate and the difficulty of local people being able to afford to get onto the property ladder, FCI would like to see **a variety of tenures and innovative funding schemes** deployed at Fountainbridge. This would ensure that the area and its new homes are accessible for all local people and that Edinburgh does not increasingly become a place only for "rich people", a commonly held view. FCI recognises the Council has a number of initiatives in this regard, and perhaps Fountainbridge could be a suitable flagship for such welcome initiatives. FCI supports guidelines indicating at least 25% of housing on the sites should be affordable, but also suggests that a target number of homes and resultant land allocated should be defined in both Masterplans.

4.2 In providing a range of homes which reflect community diversity we would like to see the inclusion of **community self-build**. By pooling their talents on group self-build projects the local community can have the opportunity to construct affordable houses which suit their individual needs. In addition, residents would have the opportunity to learn new skills, local (often smaller) construction companies would thrive, innovation would be encouraged and homes could be created which are much more energy efficient than industry alternatives. The National Self-Build Association claims that people who build their own homes are shown to stay in them significantly longer than those who simply buy or rent, and of course long-term residency is an important factor in building resilient, invested neighbourhoods

4.3 Given the limited resources at the Councils disposal in this area and the city – wide demand, FCI would also like to see other relevant stake-holders involved to add support and resource to the task, including Housing Associations, Co-operatives, Development Trusts, Housing Charities, and enlightened developers. All this would take time to arrange and we would ask that the Council would see itself as a patient

long term investor and developer. This would give space and time for others to get on board in an inclusive process. There are many strong examples in Europe where this patient, organic, evolving and inclusive process has been successful and where the local authority has played this enlighten role.

5 Design and layout

5.1 Local people want affordable homes with a front door, a garden, and a safe street. They do not want concrete blocks with flat roofs facing directly onto a busy road. Whilst this may be obvious, FCI think that every effort should be made in design and layout to address these basic human requirements rather than start with a plan of just a number of units and cost per unit.

5.2 Accordingly we would like to see the Masterplan impose and carry out strict design and layout guidelines for homes which will produce an attractive healthy and green environment. We want the planners to learn from best practice elsewhere and not bend to traditional/easy solutions or development pressure.

5.3 FCI would like to see;

- Roofs and a skyline with interest and variety.
- Some sort of design concept throughout the development which is innovative and produces continuity across the site, yet has design features and interest at key points. There are many examples in Europe of excellent waterside developments we could learn from.
- Balconies and small gardens in every area and at every level, either individual or shared.
- Closets, terraces, courtyards, which provide inter-mediate public/private space between the home and the fully public realm. Giving a strong element of supervision and safety.
- A mix of building form, with flats mixed with town houses and other uses.
- A spread of density across the site interspersed with open space and views across, through, and outwith the site.
- A reflection of the canalside location in design and layout. Something different, something unique.

6. Development, management, and ownership

6.1 FCI would like and welcome the Council and/or its development arm in playing the role of over-arching developer and equally importantly as a patient long term investor in the area. In housing terms this is a challenge, providing new mechanisms to allow local people to access new homes through joint equity, rent to buy, social and/or community ownership ,etc. Whilst also ensuring affordability and quality of design and layout.

6.2 What seems clear is a quick fix and sell –off will not achieve or deliver on community aspirations and is likely to produce another generic, dull, corporate development which does not engage with its wider community.

6.3 FCI suggests that in the Council taking a long term view and a enlightened development perspective it can engage constructively with a whole host of agencies and stakeholders who are equally excited at the potential of creating something really special at Fountainbridge. This will bring the Council credibility, share its risk and burden and bring in a host of additional expertise and resource to be deployed. It will also enable the Council to engage constructively over time with all aspects of the community.

6.4 FCI believe new homes accessible to local people is central to the overall vision of a sustainable new community at Fountainbridge. FCI will be fully supportive of the Council if it seeks to rise to this important challenge at Fountainbridge.