

# Blacket Association: Annual Report – 2009 / 2010

## **1 Alfred Place Development**

The year has seemed to pass very quickly with periods of feverish activity followed by a wait for the next stage in the process, all of course related to the latest and final stage in the redevelopment of the former Rowans Nursing Home site. The main elements of how that process developed over the year are reproduced below (for a reminder in more detail see the series of Newsletters)

We were first advised of the change in ownership of the site and of the proposal for 10 traditional style houses and 5 flats just before Christmas 2009. We then accepted the opportunity to hear about the proposals direct from the architects and developer, and a meeting was held in mid-January involving the committee and a number of directly-affected residents. During the wide-ranging discussion at the meeting, a number of concerns were expressed, both as regards aspects of the design and aesthetics of the development – including the limited use of stone facing and the absence of stone walling between on-site properties – and likely parking/traffic outcomes. Some concern was also expressed about the proximity and height relationship of the proposed houses at the western end of the site to the adjacent properties in Blacket Place. It was noted that restricted parking provision was attributed to compliance with Council policies but the architect and developer undertook to consider all of the comments made, confirmed that a tree survey had been undertaken and reported that landscape proposals were in preparation.

The formal Planning process kicked in thereafter but the Committee's comments and objections were held back in anticipation that modifications were in preparation in response to the points previously raised with the architects/developer. The Committee's representations were submitted a few days ahead of the scheduled deadline of 19 February, and further comments were added when revised drawings, with a deadline of 2 March, were published – which took in some modifications made by the architects/developer in response to earlier suggestions.

Over this period, it was also considered important that individual comments should be made by residents at the appropriate points, in addition to those submitted by the committee, and, from early in the proceedings, considerable effort was put into the production and distribution of a series of Blacket Newsletters – all of which were also website-mounted – so as to keep the range of members and neighbours fully informed as planning for the project developed. Matters were not helped by the procedural constraints of the Council's online planning process. Information had to be sourced via its Planning Portal but there was delay in supplementary information being uploaded onto the Portal without any relaxation of the on-line deadlines for submission of comments. The overall processing of the application by the Planning Department also took much longer than anticipated and it was not until 28 July that a report was presented to the Council's Development Management Sub Committee (DMSC) recommending approval of the developer's scheme. Our Councillors requested a fuller presentation, and the Committee agreed to make a site visit before reaching their decision.

A subsequent meeting of the DMSC on 11 August approved the application but we have since been advised by the architects that some information on the Council website had not been kept up-to-

date as revisions were agreed, and also inaccurate information regarding parking restrictions was presented to Committee.

The final set of corrected drawings made available to us by the architects incorporate the various changes made to date, though it still remains our hope that additional on-site parking provision can be agreed with the Council which would also address our concerns about the impact of the development for on-street resident parking. These latter points were discussed at a further open meeting for residents with the architects/developer held on 25 August, prior to a proposed October start on site.

POSTSCRIPT – a start in November is now proposed but a revised planning application has been lodged – details are in a new November Newsletter.

## **2 Roads, Traffic & Parking**

Traffic generation and Parking implications formed a significant aspect of the assessment of and comments made regarding the revised Alfred Place development proposals and time has not been found to follow-up on the 2009 Traffic Survey. The Association undertook the surveys at a time when the Council was consulting on proposals for a southward expansion of the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) and these proposals are still in process but in a substantially modified form. Although they do not directly affect Blacket, in that no boundary changes are proposed to Zone 7 within which we fall, there are likely to be future changes, including a limitation on the number of resident parking permits throughout the CPZ.

Construction traffic related to the Alfred Place site is likely to be directed to use the east end of Mayfield Terrace for practical reasons – and to minimise the risk of damage to the Blacket Pillars – but will add to the volume of traffic on Mayfield Terrace, a matter which is already of concern to residents. Use of the road by through traffic seeking to avoid East Mayfield is the prime issue, but also the narrow section of road near the Minto Street junction presents hazards for cyclists and the one-way restriction is abused.

The Council has a long-term aim to reduce traffic speed in residential areas throughout the City and is in the process of proposing a pilot area across South Edinburgh which would include Blacket. Enforcement of an imposed speed reduction to ensure it is effective is a potential weakness, particularly where through traffic is taking residential streets to avoid delays on the 'primary' roads they ought to be using.

Mention has been made of safeguarding the Blacket Pillars at the Mayfield Terrace/ Dalkeith Road junction during the Alfred Place construction work. Sadly the Pillar on the south side of the Blacket Avenue/ Dalkeith Road junction was again struck by a high vehicle earlier in the year, resulting in the top 'cap' being dislodged by a few inches. We have been assured by Highways that its condition is not dangerous and they have undertaken to investigate providing a pavement bollard as further protection. During July, Blacket Avenue from Minto Street to Dalkeith Road (other than the setted raised junction) was repaired and resurfaced, albeit that some drainage difficulties arose because of levels being raised. The parking restriction markings were not fully restored until August and this resulted in some parking abuse.

## **Open Gardens and Landscaping**

We were unable to make the necessary arrangements for the usual Open Gardens evening this year, normally held during June, and in order to ensure that this popular gathering can take place next summer we would request early offers of participation for 2011 from garden owners. We are now benefiting from all the work and investment put into the Blacket Landscape Project in earlier years which is fortunate because, for various reasons, the availability of manpower has been less this year. The very severe weather in late December/early January does not seem to have had a lasting effect on either the trees or under-planting but the spring bulb display would probably benefit from some supplementary planting as some areas are getting thin. The only recurring problem is the depositing or accumulation of litter.

## **Neighbourhood Watch**

Our Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator writes

NW is now called by the Police 'the Safer Neighbourhood Team'. Our two policewomen are PC Lynsey Collins & PC Kelly Hurt. The Police Community Newsletter has been sent out only occasionally this year. Apart from auto vandalism the most serious crimes occurring this year have been; (1) - a cannabis farm in south Blacket Place, raided by the police in early spring; (2) - lately, in the last 2 months, there have been 4 burglaries, 2 in north Blacket Place, 1 in south Blacket Place & 1 in Dryden Place - in all cases, the occupants were away, some only for a few days, and ground floor windows, either sash or French, were forced open. There were no burglar alarms in 2 cases, a fake alarm in one, and a burglar alarm disarmed by the thieves to prevent it from working in the last case. This suggests a certain degree of professionalism and that opportunists have been watching the area carefully to pinpoint the vacant and more vulnerable properties. I would encourage everyone to get a modern burglar alarm, which is monitored and serviced yearly. If you are against alarms, I would suggest that in the winter months at least, when shutters and or curtains are used, that you get a neighbour to shut and open the curtains night and morning, or get somebody to live in your house. It is so obvious in the winter when an occupant is absent, and putting on a light is little deterrent. Also, please inform someone local when you are away, so that they can keep an eye on the place. We must get as clued up as the thieves. In this respect an early warning that the annual distribution of Yellow Pages directories will take place over 2 to 3 weeks from 29 th November – please try to avoid these being left on doorsteps, yours or your neighbours, as this draws attention to unoccupied houses.

## **Licensing and other Planning Matters**

As mentioned in last year's report the recent changes to both Planning and Licensing procedures have been evolving, Licensing from September 2009 and the final adoption of the new Edinburgh City Local Plan (ECLP) from Spring 2010. The Alfred Place development has dominated planning activity this year but there have been few local planning applications requiring a significant amount of consideration or comment. A revised version of the proposals for the Cameron Toll Shopping Centre has very recently been lodged, now including a 4-level car park, and the traffic implications could well affect the Dalkeith Road & Minto Street/ Craigmillar Park corridors.

## **Communication and the Website**

Earlier difficulties with back-up arrangements for amending Website content have been overcome and the frequent Newsletters generated in relation to the Alfred Place development were posted as they were distributed. The use of the email links on the website for communication has been very limited, and we would still welcome suggestions, and in particular input of an anecdotal or historic nature to add interest to the website.

## **Subscriptions**

A substantial proportion of residents now pay the £5 per household subscription by standing order. If you would like to do so, please request a standing order form from the Secretary or Treasurer and return the completed form to either of them, or alternatively send your subscription to the Treasurer.