

Written Submission to City of Edinburgh Council Planning Committee on behalf of Inch Community Association (Scottish Charity Number: 049401) 29th September

Subject: Choices for City Plan 2030 > Proposed zoning of housing in Inch Nurseries located within the Inch Park.

To Planning Committee Members

In August I wrote informally on behalf of The Inch Community Association to all members of the Planning Committee to urge them to abandon the proposal contained within the Choices for City Plan 2030 to zone housing in the Inch Nurseries. I trust that all members of the Committee had the opportunity to consider that request and the background material provided. I have now included it in Appendix A as part of this formal written submission.

The information provided in Appendix A speaks for itself. It provides background information, a representative sample of comments extracted from the Council's consultation website and a letter of support from former Inch Councillor Bill Cook.

The comments provided by local people we believe communicate the strength of feeling locally. Over 260 people formally lodged an objection the proposal using the City Plan 2030 Choices consultation portal. This represents more than 1 in 7 of all the submissions made under the City Plan 2030 Choices consultation process from the whole of Edinburgh. On Friday afternoon we launched our petition urging the Council to abandon these proposals and instead work with the community to develop the nursery for community use as declared in the original progressive vision for The Inch.

Our petition urges the following action.

- 1) We call on City of Edinburgh Council to immediately withdraw the current proposal to build housing in Inch Park from their City Plan 2030 vision document.
- 2) We further call on the Council to commit itself to permanently protecting the essential character and integrity of Inch Park, as well as to engaging closely with the local community about how best to use the Nursery site in the future, if it is no longer needed by the Council as a plant nursery.

As of this afternoon the petition has been signed by nearly 2,000 people. That's more than responded to the official Choices consultation for the whole of Edinburgh. The comments overwhelmingly come from people who live locally and are associated with the park. For information the full text posted on-line in support of the petition can be found in Appendix B.

As you will find in reading the information, contained within the appendices, local people are extremely concerned about official misapprehensions relating to the park. Firstly, the plant nursery has been described in official council documentation as industrial. This simply isn't the case. Secondly, there appears to be confusion about the location of the nursery.

Again, this was reflected in today's Evening News with a comment attributed to the Planning Convener. It's stated that the "Inch Nursery which is **adjacent** to the public park". It's actually located **in the middle** of the park, as can be seen on the attached map (Appendix A). The rest of the park surrounds it on all sides. As is mentioned in the accompanying information half the present nursery was once in the park and open to the entire community. Lastly, putting aside impact of perhaps as many as 2000 people living in the centre of the park it is inconceivable that 800 houses can be located there without intruding further into the parkland. At present the nurseries is serviced by a single narrow road that exits on to a dangerous bend on the Old Dalkeith Road. These observations are in addition to the many points highlighted previously to Planning Committee members.

The local community hopes the Council will take fully on board the potential devastating impact of such proposals. We welcome the opportunity to answer your questions and clarify any points that you might highlight.

Best regards
Kevin Gibbons

Chairperson Inch Community Association.

APPENDIX A (press release from 8/8)

Is Edinburgh Council really planning to build new houses for up to 2000 people in the centre of Inch Park?

This Wednesday morning Edinburgh Council's Planning Committee will meet to consider its bold new vision for the future of our city entitled City Plan 2030. In the Council's own words, this "*wide-ranging document sets out options for how to make best use of land for future development.*" The review follows an extensive consultation process which ended on 30th April, when members of the public were invited to give their views on the proposals.

Residents in the Inch community have reacted with dismay and utter disbelief to the proposal to build houses inside their local park and many have already lodged official objections. **Indeed, more than 1 in 7 of all of the comments received on the City Plan 2030 proposals from the whole of Edinburgh contained objections to building houses in the Inch Nursery.**

The Association feel that the level of opposition expressed is understated in the consultation findings report. Some **260 people** registered their opposition to building in the heart of the Inch Park (see Appendix 1 containing a representative sample of the comments that local people and groups registered).

Local people are astonished that among the options being considered is that of building between 465 and 813 dwellings (in other words, housing for up to 2000 people) inside Inch Park. These would be located in the Inch Park Nursery, which is currently used for growing many of the flowers and plants which transform Edinburgh's parks and gardens every summer. It is immediately adjacent to a Local Nature Conservation Site as indicated in the current LDP.

Much confusion has arisen from the Council's practice of referring to the Nursery as one of its "depots", as if it has an existence quite separate from Inch Park. But this is not the case. **The Nursery is situated smack in the middle of Inch Park and is surrounded by parkland on all sides** (an illustration of the park is provided below). Moreover, according to the City Plan 2030 document, the Nursery is officially an industrial "brownfield site". This is quite incredible given the area was identified as green open space in the current LDP. And as any observer can see for themselves, most of the site is of a parkland character and is filled with trees and greenery.

Many of the trees you see growing in Inch Park are actually ones growing in the Nursery. Many of the best views of the Park are ones which include the Nursery. **The Nursery is organically inseparable from the rest of the Park** (indeed more than half of today's Nursery was actually annexed from the surrounding Park in a "land grab" during the 1970s). If this area was to be covered by housing, the view would then be one of concrete instead of trees, and Inch Park as we know it would be destroyed.

Everyone understands the need to build houses. But since when did it become Council policy to use Edinburgh's parks as building sites? And where in these plans are people meant to go for relaxation when all the City's greenspaces are built over?

Inch Park is one of the most extensive and beautiful green spaces in the whole of Edinburgh, beloved by generations of Edinburgh citizens over the years. It is visited daily as a place of recreation, for walking, meetings, playing sports, to encounter nature or in order to escape from the stresses of urban life. It contains the magnificent Inch House, the home of the local community centre and an A-listed historical building with a 16th/17th century castellated tower house and adjoining walled gardens at its core. Under the City Plan 2030 vision the gardens would be entirely obliterated and a mass of modern housing would be crammed practically against the walls of Inch House. This cannot be an appropriate or respectful use for such a culturally important site.

Wednesday's meeting will begin the countdown to a final decision. So, there is still time to act. I would encourage all Councillors to oppose this terrible idea to build houses inside Inch Park.

Indeed, I would call upon the Planning Committee take the opportunity to abandon the proposal at Wednesday's meeting. Instead they should work with local people to find a solution which maintains the integrity of the Park and ensures that the Nursery is used for the benefit of the whole community and not just sold off to developers. I have also enclosed a letter of support from former Councillor Bill Cook who grew up in The Inch and has since written a history of the formation of the scheme and the Park itself (see Appendix 2). Hopefully you may find this informative and it will explain why local people oppose this proposal so vehemently.

Inch Park is one of Edinburgh's priceless treasures. And once it's gone, it's gone forever.

Kevin Gibbons
Chairperson of Inch Community Association



APPENDIX 1 Representative Comments (extracted from on Council Website)

The Choices for City Plan 2030 Consultation Key Findings document reported that some 1800 responses had been submitted by the public. Of these some **260** people recorded their opposition to the zoning of up to 800 houses on the Inch Nurseries in the centre of the Inch Park. The report to council only summarises these comments all 260 odd of which can be viewed on the Council's webcast. The following is a selection of the objections registered.

Local Community Organisations

Kevin Gibbons (Chairperson) Inch Community Association

"There are many serious objections to be made ... The development will have a massive negative impact on Inch Park. ... Building hundreds of new houses in the middle of Inch Park will totally transform its character ... The development will seriously undermine the unique

historical heritage value of Inch Park ... The development will put enormous stress on the local community infrastructure ... If the Council no longer believes that it requires the nursery site for plant-growing purposes, there are surely more imaginative and appropriate ways the site can be utilised than to build a mass of new houses there, and ways which will also better preserve the character and integrity of the Park”.

Lesley Gibson-Eaglesham of Gilmerton & Inch Community Council

“ ... we fail to understand why we are losing so much green space from our own Community Council area, including an area zoned for housing within Inch Park”.

Valerie Agnew of Liberton After School Club

“We strongly object to the use of the Inch Park Nursery site for housing development. The Park is a historic green space, and community hub widely used by all who live in the area and should remain and be developed as a community resource as it was intended to be when first purchased for the people of Edinburgh”.

Caitlin Gould of Lismore Rugby Football Club

As a founding member of Inch Park Community Sports Club and key users of the park we strongly object to the impact this proposal could have going forward.... The provisioning of housing on this site is not only unsuitable but will also disrupt the whole park and have a massive impact on the rest of the green space ... The site itself if it had to be repurposed would be much better suited to being developed as a community resource and to help increase the clear lack of affordable all weather sporting facilities in the south east of Edinburgh”.

Eleanor Weir of Liberton Primary School Association

“Liberton Primary School Association object to the building of residential accommodation on Inch Park, on the Inch Park Nursery site. This will change the face of Inch Park. The infrastructure is not sufficient and the school rolls are already incredibly high in this area, particularly Liberton Primary School which borders Inch Park. Our families need green space and this proposed development will cut right into this treasured local amenity”.

Dougie Barnett of Bridgend Cottages Residents Association

“Although the council seems to have classed the Inch Park Nursery Site as brownfield I object strongly to any housing development on this site. The site should be developed as a community asset as it was intended to be when the council was given the site by the Gilmore family to be "used in perpetuity by the local community ... This site is perfect for many of the uses of green space alluded to in the various sections of this document. Perhaps more so than any other site in Edinburgh ... The housing proposal is short sighted, based on a quick selloff for cash, and completely misses all the other desires of the council to create, healthy, high quality sustainable green sites... The potential to develop this site at very low cost into something truly ground-breaking and world class is incredible. Something this council could be proud of for generations to come”.

Bill Cook former Councillor for Liberton & Gilmerton

“I strongly object to the proposal to use the Inch Park Nursery site for housing development. The proposal to zone this area for housing is completely contrary with the vision that established The Inch Housing & Community Development after the war. Indeed, the original specification for The Inch community development included this area and the entire park. It specifically stated this area should retained for community and recreational use. A large part of the area in the present nursery site was once part of the park itself (some 50%). Should the nursery site no longer be required this area should be developed for community use”.

A Selection of Resident Comments extracted Council Website

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPVA-N]

“I also note the identification within the Choices document of the Inch Nursery as a brownfield development site. This area was previously designated as part of a green space, and its reclassification as a brownfield site is puzzling”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GWME-Q]

“Completely disagree with any proposal to build high density housing in Inch Nursery. I think it is disingenuous that you have classified it an industrial site instead of greenfield given that it is entirely situated in Inch Park”

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GP51-4]

“The plans to build on the council ground within the Inch park is just ridiculous” “Inch Park is place where people and families go to relax and enjoy what little outdoor space we have in the city, I think it would be a real shame to put flats right in the middle of this space”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GP56-9]

“The Park is a historic green space, and community hub widely used by all who live in the area and should remain and be developed as a community resource as it was intended to be when first purchased for the people of Edinburgh”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GW3P-8]

“The labelling of Inch nursery as Urban are is duplicitous at best. It is nearly entirely associated with horticultural/agriculture use and is inside a park. The residents see this as a park in a park, reallocating the use of this as brownfield is a betrayal of public and community interest”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GP81-7]

“I was raised in the Inch and enjoyed the use of the Inch Park throughout my childhood I have noticed with some disappointment the gradual erosion of the parkland by the annexing of the Nursery and also by several periphery developments over the years To develop this area right in the middle of the Inch Park with housing is, in my opinion, completely in opposition to the amenity of the area”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPEJ-D]

“I can't understand how we can justify having greenfield sites then destroying them”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPG9-X]

“Any housing being built [In Inch Nurseries] would impact residents lives greatly”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPGH-D]

“....it must remain as a community resource as intended when it was purchased for the residents of Edinburgh. it is needed now more than ever - and would be ruined by any housing development”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPGK-G]

"I have lived in this Inch area since age 11 ... All of my family and neighbours and friends object".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPGV-U]

"Our families need green space and this proposed development will cut right into this treasured local amenity".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPH4-T]

"I live in the inch and am completely horrified".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPHW-W]

"... the nursery should never have been built there. So rather than convert that to even more damaging housing, it should be converted back to open parkland as originally intended".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPQS-2]

"The proposal [taking over Inch Nursery] for the purpose of building 813 new homes is incomprehensible".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPQY-8]

"If the nursery is no longer needed in its current position it should revert back to its original green space with the walled garden maintained".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPRE-N]

"I do not want any building on the Inch Park, it would DEVASTATE the local community".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPUP-3]

"Building on greenfield and on park land, as with the proposal for Inch Park Nursery, takes away the city's lungs".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPVN-2]

"... I specifically object to the plant nursery site in Inch Park being used for a housing development. The integrity of the park environment would be disrupted by a housing development. Using the site for allotments would be far preferable".

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GW16-C]

“I feel it would be devastating for this project to go ahead”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GW49-J]

“It would be a disgrace for the council to consider building there”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GW4M-6]

“The impact of so many additional houses would not only ruin the parkland the environmental impact would be disastrous... STOP THIS IMMEDIATELY”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GW6C-X]

“ ... as a resident of The Inch I strongly object to the council nursery land in the very heart of Inch Park being built on. This will devastate the beautiful open green space of the park and overwhelm an already crowded residential area”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GW76-J]

“I do not want development in the middle of Inch Park. I do not consider the Inch Park nursery site as brownfield”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GWBD-B]

“I object in the strongest terms to the use of the Inch Park Nursery site for housing development ...The various negative effects on the Park is surely self evident”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GWBZ-1]

“I object to the use of the inch park plant nursery being used for housing ... I am really appalled the CEC have even proposed such a housing scheme within a public park”.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GWD6-Y]

“I cannot express how strongly I oppose the building of any dwellings on the site of the current CEC nursery in Inch Park’.

Resident Comment [ANON-KU2U-GPRU-5]

“As someone who was brought up in the Inch in the 1950’s to 1980 I know only too well the value of the Inch Park as a park ... and I must say that I object in the strongest possible term to these plans. The use of this area as a public park for the local community is immeasurable and as such I would urge reconsideration of said plans”.

APPENDIX 2 Letter of support to Inch Community Association (former Councillor Bill Cook)

To Planning Committee Members

I fully support the Inch Community Association and local residents in opposing the proposal to zone the Inch Nurseries for up to 800 houses, right in the heart of the Inch Park. This would have a devastating impact on the park. Indeed, it would destroy the character of the area.

The Council's Housing Study describes the Inch Nurseries as industrial. In no stretch of the imagination can this site be described as such. These are horticultural nurseries. Aside from road access and parking spaces the site is largely plantation and greenhouses centred in and around the historic walled garden. Until recently the cottage located within the nursery was home to the New Caledonian Woodlands environmental sustainability and mental well-being charity. The area immediately adjacent to the horticultural nursery is identified on the current LDP as a Local Nature Conservation Site.

The proposal to zone this area for housing is completely contrary with the vision that established The Inch Housing & Community Development after the war. The park was integral to the design of the housing community. Indeed, the original specification for The Inch community development included the entire park with its walled garden. Towards one third of the land purchased from the Gilmour family, including the proposed site, was specifically designated parkland for recreation and community use.

The grand design for The Inch including the parkland was largely implemented; the exception being the use of the walled garden as a council nursery. In the 1970s the site was almost doubled in size by incorporating what was open parkland into the nursery itself. This included almost half of the 9-hole golf course that was once located there.

The creation of The Inch was the direct result of the progressive vision of post war town planners and politicians. It received very many plaudits. Historic Scotland's 1996 publication *Building For The Future*, stated The Inch's design reflected the utopian housing principles expressed by Tom Johnston, Scotland's wartime Secretary of State. The Saltire Society declared it as the "best local authority housing in Scotland". The commitment to parkland and green open spaces featured very much in these assessments.

Before concluding I would make this personal observation as I think it typical of what very many local people feel. People like myself benefitted greatly from growing up in a Garden City located within its own parkland. For my family it was a complete contrast to the slums of Greenside where my older brothers first lived. I have no doubt whatsoever that this contributed positively to my own personal development. There was not a day in my childhood that I didn't play in the park when I could get a chance. I think the Planning Committee will agree that greenspaces and parkland are vital for people's well-being and development.

Should the nursery site no longer be required this area should be developed for community use in accordance with the vision that created The Inch in the first place. Local people are buzzing with ideas about what should be done here. I would urge the Planning Committee to take the opportunity of this week's meeting to abandon these proposals and work with local people to take their vision forward.

Bill Cook former Councillor for Liberton & Gilmerton

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APPENDIX B Petition Text

Inch Park is one of the most extensive and beautiful green spaces in the whole of Edinburgh, beloved by generations of Edinburgh citizens over the years. It is visited daily as a place of recreation, for walking, meetings, playing sports, to encounter nature or simply to escape from the stresses of urban life. It is a place of extraordinary character and heritage value (with the historic Inch House in the middle of it), and is vital to the happiness and wellbeing of the local Inch community.

Now Inch Park is directly threatened by Edinburgh Council's City Plan 2030 proposals to build housing for up to 2000 people in Inch Park Plant Nursery, smack in the centre of the Park. Moreover, the Council has made no attempt to share its plans for the Nursery development with the local Inch Community.

Such a development would destroy the unique character of Inch Park for ever. Instead of trees, there would be a view of concrete, and instead of people, there would be hundreds of extra cars criss-crossing Inch Park daily as the new residents inevitably use the existing road through the park as a 'rat run'. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Edinburgh's parks are a priceless legacy and community resource for future generations. They deserve to be treasured and protected, not simply sold off by the Council to property developers as an easy way of raising cash.

With these considerations in mind:

1) We call on City of Edinburgh Council to immediately withdraw the current proposal to build housing in Inch Park from their City Plan 2030 vision document.

2) We further call on the Council to commit itself to permanently protecting the essential character and integrity of Inch Park, as well as to engaging closely with the local community about how best to use the Nursery site in the future, if it is no longer needed by the Council as a plant nursery.

Please sign this petition and help us save one of the Edinburgh's most wonderful parks!!