



# Friends of Corstorphine Hill

## NEWSLETTER No. 33

September 2008

Editor: Les Hutcheon Tel 334 3832

### **Plans, Housing, Zoo, Appeals and Proposed Developments on the Hill**

As the Friends endeavour to keep up with the the continuing saga. Below is an update of what we believe to be the current situation, described by Donald Gorrie.

FoCH are co-operating with four other local organisations – Corstorphine, Murrayfield and Drum Brae Community Councils and the Corstorphine Trust and with local residents in and around Kaimies Road – and are co-ordinating our response to the issue of whether the Zoo's proposals for 120 or so houses and flats on their land adjoining Kaimies Road should be included in the city's Local Plan or not. Our group has had several meetings, including one at the Zoo to be briefed on the details of their proposals and the thinking behind them and one with the Convener and Vice-Convener of the Council's Planning Committee.

Having deleted the Zoo's proposals from the Local Plan, the Council is on the same side of the argument as ourselves and we are co-operating with them, as we are advancing similar arguments. We have submitted a Stated Case to the Inquiry into the Local Plan.

The issue of the Zoo's housing proposals is likely to be heard on December 3rd. The points we have concentrated on are:- the strongly felt and widespread local opposition to the Zoo's proposals in our communities; the intrusion into an Area of Great Landscape Value and an important part of the Green Belt to build houses for which there is no demand in planning or housing policy –they are proposed only to make money for the Zoo ; creating a precedent for future applications for housing developments on Corstorphine Hill; the visual intrusion into a major part of many fine views in Edinburgh, replacing trees with houses and a road and tarmac or paved areas and replacing the Zoo's frontage onto Corstorphine Road with blocks of flats, concealing the Zoo completely from passing motorists and bus passengers; causing serious increases in traffic and parking problems in and around Corstorphine Road – the Zoo proposes one road to serve all the traffic to and from the Zoo, the hotel and the 120 houses with a traffic light junction onto Corstorphine Road just east of the Forestry Commission; they will have to enable safe crossing over the main road by all Zoo visitors, who are not parked in the car park, and possibly compete with another new traffic light at the Pinkhill junction; the harm to the plants and wildlife on Corstorphine Hill, the increase in atmospheric pollution, and the increased risk of flooding.

Any member wishing to read our full statement should contact Donald Gorrie for a copy.

## Ranger's Report

What a summer we have had, if you can even call it a summer, rain, rain and more rain!! It hasn't all been doom and gloom on the hill though, several volunteer and community groups have been out undertaking a variety of tasks, I have been out patrolling as regularly as I can, the badgers have been having a whale of a time and instances of litter have been much fewer due to the wet weather.

Since May 2008, there have been 22 patrols of the hill undertaken, patrols encompass all the main pathways making sure they are clear, invaluable contact with the regular users on the hill and in keeping a record of wildlife sightings; the woodpeckers seem to be thriving, still no sign of the elusive nuthatch that I have been told has been sighted recently but fewer butterflies than normal (due to the wet weather). The new paths and drainage systems seem to be coping well with the large amounts of water although the usual problem areas on the eastern slopes require attention (a job for the winter months).

Maintenance of the site has been ongoing, some of the main things being:

- trees coming down obstructing paths being cleared.
- mountain bike trails, shelters and jumps being backfilled and removed; an ongoing problem that I will persist with my attempts to reduce this kind of destructive behaviour.
- 6 litter picks of main hotspots with volunteers and some impromptu ones whilst out patrolling.
- the padlocks have been replaced on the tower door and both Clermiston Road car park and Kaimes Road barriers due to vandalism.
- vegetation cutbacks undertaken on the most heavily used paths.
- garden waste dumping from housing in the Craiggrook/Hillpark area has been cleared and the Environmental Wardens made aware of problem.
- graffiti removed from new signage.
- instances of fly tipping in Clermiston Road car park cleared.
- sustained effort in tackling invasive, non-native species.

Several events have been run on the hill over the summer; there have been 3 advertised badger walks delivered and a further 2 on request; Forest School programmes have been carried out (see Jenny Watters article); a presentation has been made to the members of the Zoo regarding the history of Corstorphine Hill and how it's managed today; guided walks have been delivered to volunteer and community groups on request.

The management of the site is hugely complemented by the vast array of volunteer groups who assist the ranger service of which there have been a few over the summer months:

George Heriot's School had a week long programme with the ranger service this year working on most of the sites we manage, a group of 25 strong and healthy sixth formers hacked away at Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam making a dent in its occupancy of the hill.

Individuals from Muirhouse Young Persons Group have been on the hill regularly over the summer and hopefully throughout the winter carrying out a variety of tasks such as tackling invasives, habitat box installations and collecting litter.

Stevenson College have again been active on all of our sites with a group from their extension course gaining practical experience, activities such as tackling invasives and litter clearances have been invaluable to us in helping to maintain and enhance our sites.

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers have assisted in a multitude of tasks ranging from tackling invasives, cutting back vegetation, drainage ditch and culvert clearances and in assisting with the installation of seating.

The summer has been a busy one, despite the adverse weather and especially since one of the team left her position with us for Dumfries and Galloway Council to take up the role of Access Officer, therefore, I have had more involvement than normal with Cammo Estate coupled with my regular remit for Corstorphine Hill, the river Almond walkway and the whole of Edinburgh's coastal areas.

Over the coming months I will be completing my coursework associated with becoming a fully qualified Forest School Practitioner, I will be attending Oatridge Agricultural College to become certified for spraying and chainsaw use, from September time towards Christmas is usually rather busy for us in delivering environmental education to school groups.

Other tasks for the forthcoming period will include devising a long term strategy for dealing with the non-native invasive species present on the hill such as Salmonberry, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed; updating the hill's maintenance plan that was written earlier in the year; looking to improve the access up the southern slopes from Corstorphine Road/Balgreen Road entrance; delivering Forest School activities across all the ranger sites and continuing to work closely with the Friends of Corstorphine Hill in progressing and developing Corstorphine Hill for the benefit of all.

Any issues to do with the hill or indeed any of the wildlife and natural heritage sites in Edinburgh please feel free to get in touch with me via the Friends or directly at:

City of Edinburgh Council, Countryside Ranger Service, 69A Braid Road, Edinburgh, EH10 6JF 0131 447 7145 [david.kyles@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:david.kyles@edinburgh.gov.uk)

David Kyles

## **Forest Education At Corstorphine Hill**

### **Forest School**

'Forest School' is fast becoming recognised in Scotland as a fantastic way to engage youngsters with both their local woodland environments and their own learning processes. Arguably its success is down to the long term nature of the programmes linking the 1<sup>st</sup> hand learning out in the woodlands back into the school through teachers assisting the students with linking their experiences to the curriculum and initiatives such as Eco schools, Health Promoting Schools and Active Schools.

"Forest School involves regular visits to a local woodland area that becomes the 'base' for learning activities. It is an inspirational process that enables children to build their confidence and self-esteem through hands on practical learning." (Forest School Leaders pack, FEI Wales)

### **Programmes**

To date Corstorphine Hill has hosted three 'Forest School' programmes through mainstream education as part of Edinburgh's Forest School pilot project 2006-2008.

In 2006/07 the first dual school programme was undertaken in Edinburgh with Foxcovert and Foxcovert RC primary joining forces with Earth Calling to experience the woodland environment throughout the seasons; each group was out in the woodlands for 12 whole days over this time.

Two unique Forest School classes were formed by mixing P5's from both schools. In January / February 2008 a similar shorter 4 session programme was undertaken with two classes from Foxcovert & Foxcovert RC primary this was undertaken by Claire Standen a placement student from the University of Edinburgh and supervised by the Forest Education Development Officer. Finally during the Summer term of 2008 a P7 class from Dalry primary undertook a 6 week (1/2 day) programme co-lead by their class teacher Kendal Gaiter, David Kyles the site's Countryside Ranger and Susan Dickson (Senior Ranger) all who had recently undertaken the Open College Network Level 3 Forest School Leader Training course which had been run as part of the project.

### **Awareness**

Corstorphine Hill has proved to be an exemplar site for showcasing the 'Forest School' project with awareness visits with Health Scotland, Scottish Executive (now Government) educational policy staff, Community Tree Wardens and Career Professional Development woodland taster days for teachers. Visits from Scottish Natural Heritage and the South African Eco-Schools Co-ordinator and National English, Welsh and Scottish Forest Education Co-ordinators have also taken place. A stop off point for all these visitors was the Friends of Corstorphine Hill Walled Garden which they all spoke highly of.

### **The Future**

The pilot Forest School project came to a close in July 2008 and the good news is that the funds to continue a further three year project (2008-2011) were found jointly by the Forestry Commission Scotland and The City of Edinburgh Council with SNH funding the Forest Education Initiative Edinburgh & Lothians with ¼ of the costs for Forest School Leader training over the next three years.

Jenny Watters

### **What's in a Name?**

I found the name Forest School confusing in the context of Corstorphine woods but there is nothing confusing about the work carried out by the enthusiastic Jenny with the young people in making them aware of the local environmental issues. If you want to learn more contact Jenny Watters, Forest Education Development Officer on 0131 4477145 or [Jennifer.watters@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Jennifer.watters@edinburgh.gov.uk)

Editor

### **Volunteers**

Martin and Iain would like to take the opportunity to thank those who help with Newsletter delivering and taking a turn with the Gate opening and closing and are always keen to have more helpers join their teams. And the garden.....did you know that for those who are unable to join the work groups on either Tuesday mornings or Thursday afternoons a work group meets on Saturday mornings from 11.00 till 12.00 co-ordinated by Sally.

The Countryside Ranger Service is also looking for volunteers. More details can be found on our website.

## Winter Talks Programme 2008 -09

**November 18<sup>th</sup>**, Tuesday evening 7.30 pm at the Capital Hotel, **Trish Alderson** of Edinburgh and Lothian Badger Group will talk to us about our local badgers and the work of the badger group in studying and protecting them.

**December 16<sup>th</sup>** , Tuesday evening at 7.30pm at the Corstorphine Heritage Centre (the Dower House) We will be holding a pre Christmas social evening as last year, to which all Friends, especially our many volunteer helpers, are invited. This is an opportunity to get together in the festive season and to say thank you to all the Friends who help us on the Hill, in the Garden, in the Tower, and with the Newsletter.

**February 11<sup>th</sup>**, Wednesday evening at 7.30 pm at the Capital Hotel, **Mr William Yuill**, a local railway enthusiast will give an illustrated talk on the 'Railways of West Edinburgh'.

**March 10<sup>th</sup>**, Tuesday evening at 7.30 pm at the Capital Hotel, **Mr Alf Orriel** the Community Engagement Officer for the Edinburgh Tramways Project, will talk about the Project and answer your questions.

Gordon Swann

## Eco Fun Day – St Columba's Blackhall

The Friends of Corstorphine Hill joined with a wide range of other groups to take part in the Eco Fun Day at St Columba's Blackhall on the 20<sup>th</sup> September. The event is now part of our annual calendar and provides a useful way of encouraging use of the hill and generating interest in the activities of the Friends. It was particularly fortuitous that there was a Tower opening the following day – one of the best of the summer – and this saw over fifty visitors. A lot of interest was also shown in the walled garden, generated by the display of photographs showing its development.

Iain McGeachy

## Summer Walks Programme

The first event was a birdwatching walk in May led by Keith Donnelly who regularly surveys the birdlife on the Hill. In mid June Su Cooper of Plantlife Scotland led a wildflower walk around the walled garden and the west side of the Hill and also told us about the work of Plantlife volunteers, particularly the Common Plants Survey. In July Gordon Swann led an enthusiastic group of parents and children on a hunt for insects in and around the walled garden. The weather was perfect, but perhaps because of the poor summer few butterflies were in evidence. However we did spot and catch a variety of bumblebees, flies and grasshoppers in a hot sunny afternoon. David Kyles, our hardworking Ranger led an interesting tour of the Hill on August 17<sup>th</sup> showing us the History and development of the woodland which makes the Hill such a beautiful and important park and nature reserve. Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September was a fine sunny day for the annual Fungus Foray led by David Adamson. The wet weather has at least been good for fungi and there were many to be found in all parts of the woods, making it a very enjoyable expedition for all. Many thanks to the volunteers who led the walks, and of course to Friends and visitors who turned up to make five delightful rambles around the Hill.

## **Tower Opening**

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The Friends have opened the Tower on 11 Sunday afternoons from May to September. In spite of poor summer weather we have had as many as 40 visitors on some Sundays, recruited quite a few new members, publicized our activities, and sold quite a few copies of our new book about the Hill.

Gordon Swann

## **Corstorphine Fair 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

Organisers and participants all gave grateful thanks for a beautiful sunny summer day for Corstorphine Fair, and thanks to the good weather, probably about 20,000 people turned up to enjoy the biggest community event in Edinburgh. Many volunteers got a sun tan staffing the Friends of Corstorphine Hill stall, which was busy all day distributing our leaflets, and selling lots of copies of our new book. Alison MacKintosh, the author, very kindly signed copies of her book for an hour or two around mid day, which contributed greatly to the success of our participation in this year's fair.

Gordon Swann

## **BOOK SALES**

Since publication of our book in April, the sales have exceeded our expectations. To date we have sold over 400 copies.

It is testament to the writing skills of our author Alison that every person who has read it has thoroughly enjoyed the journey.

Local sales have been excellent thanks to the Corstorphine Library and the Dower House. Postal sales have also been good with a number of copies being sent down south and elsewhere in Scotland.

With Christmas on the horizon, do you know someone who would like a copy?

Fred Davies

## **WEDDING PHOTO'S IN THE WALLED GARDEN**

I have had four couples having their wedding photo's taken in the walled garden. All have complimented us on having such a great setting.

It has been interesting to see the different ideas that people choose when planning their wedding. We have had various vehicles, from stretch limo's to vintage cars, and all the grooms have worn kilts, one couple even had a piper playing in the garden.

I have three bookings for 2009 already.

Fred Davies

**Friends of Corstorphine Hill**

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Chairman: Mr E Price, Corstorphine Hill Avenue Edinburgh EH12 6LF. Tel 0131 539 1088

Secretary: Mr D Gorrie [donauldgorrie@btinternet.com](mailto:donauldgorrie@btinternet.com)

Website: [www.corstorphinehill.org.uk](http://www.corstorphinehill.org.uk)