

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

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EDINBURGH COLONY HOUSING – CONSULTATION

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/1220/conservation/1770/edinburgh_colonies_character_appraisals/1

BACKGROUND

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the above. It is not within our remit to comment on whether or not Colony housing should be given conservation status, but we wish to comment on the question of bicycle storage should conservation status be granted – and, indeed, if not.

As you are aware, the full City Council has unanimously approved the *Active Travel Action Plan*, which is therefore now official policy. This includes hugely ambitious targets to increase cycle use, rapidly and substantially, with separate target figures for commuting (affecting adults of working age and businesses) and for all-purpose trips (affecting people of all ages). Additionally, the Council has signed up to the even more ambitious *Charter of Brussels* target that 15% of all trips should be by bike in 2020. Current cycling modal share in Edinburgh is approximately 7% for commuter trips [Scottish Household Survey] and 2%-3% for all trips [verbal estimate by a transport officer].

There is little chance of meeting such ambitious targets unless all relevant parts of the council work together, and policies are coordinated. Furthermore, any new planning policy decision not compatible with the above existing policy will leave the council being seen as inconsistent. Policies in one department or section which are incompatible with those in another are clearly not acceptable.

It has become increasingly apparent that domestic bike storage constraints are a serious brake on growing cycle use. As far back as 2008 the difficulties for flat and tenement dwellers were confirmed in research by Dr Tim Ryley¹. More recently it has become very clear that the problems extend to other types of housing, including many with gardens – such as terraces with no access to back gardens except through the house, and Colony housing where there are no back gardens at all.

As the council is aware, Spokes has been contacted by several householders who have been refused permission for bike storage sheds or containers, or who have been ordered to remove existing storage. These families have in some cases suffered very great stress, and financial loss; and most feel hugely and understandably upset that one side of the council is preventing them from doing what another side of the council, together with the government and public health agencies, are urging them to do. Furthermore they feel aggrieved that the council is providing householders with onstreet parking (i.e. storage space) for cars whilst families who choose not to own a car are prevented from providing their own bike storage. Quotes from families illustrating these points may be found on our website².

¹ www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/documents/technical-and-research/local-transport-research

² <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2012/09/bike-shed-bans/>

The council consoles itself with the fact that appeals by families about bike storage have always been refused by government Reporters. However Spokes considers it extremely disturbing that the City Council has not informed Reporters of the Council's own policies greatly to increase cycle use – thereby knowingly allowing Reporters to make decisions based on partial information. Reporters have of course been aware of the government's own significantly less ambitious national cycling objectives, but have felt these to be outweighed by Edinburgh's local planning objectives. Had Reporters been made aware by the Council of all relevant Council policies, then the outcomes might have not always been the same.

COLONY HOUSING

Should the council decide to grant conservation status to the Colonies, it must make certain, first, that the above stresses and unhappinesses are not foisted onto residents as a side-effect; and, second, that it does nothing to detract from the existing council policies to increase use of bicycles very rapidly and substantially.

Whilst we are concerned about bicycle storage in a variety of housing types, Colonies have particular issues. The interior of the houses is small compared to most housing types, even many tenement houses. Colony houses do have a garden (which means that garden equipment is necessary and must be stored), but the garden is small and only at the front.

In addition to the health and environmental reasons for using bikes, Colony householders have an additional reason to need bicycles – the fact that in many cases only very limited car parking space is available. In some cases [e.g. Dalry Colonies] the council has even gone to the extent of providing car storage space [though not bicycle storage].

Different householders will require storage of different types, capacities, lengths and widths. In addition to garden equipment, many will require 2 bicycles with relatively convenient access. Some will also need a child bicycle; a small number may need a child or luggage trailer, or a tandem with kiddy-seat. Flexibility is essential.

Furthermore, it must be emphasised that, in the common-sense understanding of the word, sheds and containers are *temporary* structures. As uses and owners change, so storage needs and containers also change, reflecting a living community. Meanwhile the essential nature of the Colonies remains.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The suggested shed dimensions in the consultation document - height 1.5m and volume 2.25cu.m - are completely inappropriate, particularly in terms of volume. In our view no dimensions (other possibly than height) should be specified, and it should be left up to the good sense of the householder and of the local community. There is little evidence that this approach has failed so far in Colony areas.

Should difficulties arise in the future, the issue should first be taken up with the relevant householder, councillors and residents association. Should that fail, and it is felt that further policies/rules are unavoidable, this should be done at a local level, in full consultation with the local residents association and Community Council.

PLANNING PERMISSION

We are not clear on the rules relating to planning permission if conservation status is granted. In our view planning permission should not be required for sheds or other containers which are considered acceptable by the local residents association and/or by neighbours. Quite apart from the bureaucracy for the council, planning permission costs are a significant issue for households on low incomes, as we have learned from one case.

We trust our comments are of use, and look forward to the results of the consultaiton

Yours Sincerely
Dave du Feu, for Spokes