

15/05100/FUL res dev, off Newmills Rd, Balerno
Objection on behalf of Spokes, the Lothians Cycle Campaign

We object to this application on two main grounds: 1 the planning status of the site; and 2 the proposals are unsustainable from a transport viewpoint.

1 Status:

The site is admittedly designated for housing (HSG37) in Edinburgh's Second Local Development Plan, but this Plan has not yet been finally approved, and it would be premature to grant planning permission on the basis of an unapproved Plan.

Indeed, it is exactly this kind of proposal - over 200 houses, remote from all amenities, and with no amenities whatsoever to be provided, (and therefore highly likely to reinforce car dependency,) which is controversial, and a contentious issue for the LDP.

2 Transport issues, with special reference to cycling:

The development's Transport Statement mentions good "pedestrian/cycle routes within the site"; and to "assist with [unspecified as to extent of contribution] improved cycle links to Curriehill Station".

Neither of these is in any way adequate; if cycling is to increase, there has to be better infrastructure from the site to local amenities, both close (eg Balerno) and more remote (eg the city, Heriot-Watt, Gyle etc) - which the developers do not propose to improve; and the train services from Curriehill Station are very poor and infrequent.

SPP (2014: para 270ff) lists the priorities for transport, in order, as:

1 **reduce the need to travel**. This development, remote from any amenities, and providing no new ones, would certainly not achieve that;

2 **facilitate travel by public transport**. While extra bus stops on Lanark Rd W are welcome, the stops are still 400m from the centre of the site, which is a distance unlikely to attract modal shift; and Curriehill Station is not only a mile away, but has poor rail services, as noted above;

3 **safe and convenient opportunities for walking and cycling**. A proposed toucan crossing of Lanark Rd W is welcome, but the opportunities for cycling are poor - see below.

Hence, this proposal will satisfy none of SPP's top three priorities.

Currently, the Statement notes, the primary mode of travel in the Currie/Balerno area is private car/passenger 54.3%, foot 20.7%, bus 19.2%. From this, it concludes that "it is reasonable to assume that large proportions of trips by future residents will be on foot or by bus". There is not a shred of evidence provided to support this assumption.

What is more, these walking/cycling figures include the villages themselves, where residents are close enough to the amenities to attract the walking and cycling modes. The development, as noted elsewhere, is remote from both Balerno and Currie, so the figures lack credibility.

The majority of vehicle traffic (ie for 188 of the 206 houses) to/from the development would enter/exit by a 3-way priority junction off Lanark Rd W. The congestion this would cause at peak hours, especially combined with a toucan crossing at this point, can only be imagined. The only available public transport (the 44 bus) would be equally disrupted by this, as there are no bus lanes here.

Air quality is a transport issue the developers do not mention. All extra traffic generated will have knock-on effects on communities 'downstream' where the roads are narrow enough to cause congestion, such as Juniper Green, the Gillespie X-roads area, Colinton Village, etc. Air quality caused by vehicle emissions is now recognised as a serious threat to public health, and a greater cause of death and sickness than road traffic accidents; this is thus a further reason for our objection to these proposals.

Cycling

Another extraordinary statement from the Transport Statement:

“Transport Assessment Guidance suggests a 30-40 minute cycle is an acceptable journey length for a local cycling trip” (no reference given - and we are not aware of anything as optimistic as this). In any case, this could be true only in ideal infrastructure conditions, such as segregated cycle routes, flat terrain, protected junction crossings, etc. None of this pertains in SW Edinburgh.

The only available cycle route locally is the NCR75 Water of Leith route, an unsurfaced route, inclined to be muddy in parts, and shared with pedestrians and horses etc - not at all suitable, in its current state, as a cycle commuting route. One would think the developers might raise their 'green' credentials by funding improvements, but they have not even suggested it.

The developers quote a figure of, currently, 2.9% modal share for cycling “in the Currie area”. That may be true for Currie, which is much closer to amenities and work places (eg Heriot-Watt); but this is Balerno, significantly further out.

In sum, this development would be a 'dormitory suburb' with no facilities of its own, too remote from amenities for convenient walking and cycling, and with limited public transport (which itself is subject to disruption from congestion); the development would be heavily dependent on the private car (despite the unrealistic claims of the developers), creating an unsustainable community.

We strongly recommend that planning permission be refused.

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