



Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association

<http://flowercolonies.org.uk>

Note: Spokes has highlighted the section dealing with garden sheds

19 October 2012

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am writing in response to the City of Edinburgh's Council's (CEC) consultation on conservation area status for Edinburgh's Colonies in my capacity as Chair of the Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association (FCARA). **FCARA fully supports the proposal in this consultation that all of Edinburgh's Colonies should be conservation areas.** This would protect the historic and architectural importance of a dwelling type which is both unique to Edinburgh and treasured by Edinburgh residents, as well as ensuring that all Colonies areas were equally protected.

I have received numerous notes of supportive feedback from FCARA members for these proposals. Additionally other Colonies contacts in Abbeyhill, etc and other Edinburgh residents associations and contacts have indicated equally concerted support for conservation area status for Colonies.

There is increasing recognition for Edinburgh's Colonies both for their historic and social value, and for the valuable lessons they can teach us about building sustainable and successful communities today. The Flower Colonies has recently been invited by the Cockburn Association to participate in the next Open Doors weekend event in 2013 so as to showcase some Colonies to the general public. In building new affordable and social housing, the phrase 'colony style' is increasingly used. Whether the buildings do actually resemble Colonies or replicate the Colonies' successful urban design is a debate for another occasion. However, it does demonstrate that the Colonies brand is alive and flourishing today; and recognised widely as a covetable place to live in Edinburgh.

I very much enjoyed the experience of supporting and working with both CEC and Edinburgh universities in my capacity as FCARA Chair throughout the process of developing the Colonies character area appraisals. It was an innovative project to be able to bring together community representatives, academia and local authority which has provided all parties with valued experiences, and in the case of the students involved, useful and meaningful work experience. Importantly, Colonies conservation area status has been accelerated up the agenda thanks to the input by university students, meaning Colonies protection can be achieved earlier.



Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association

<http://flowercolonies.org.uk>

General support

It is very important that all the Colonies are protected. This is not the case at present and has led to some Colonies areas being put at risk – as with the Flower Colonies in recent years where an inappropriate high rise development of student dwellings was granted planning permission in the Flower Colonies area.

All Colonies should receive conservation area status so as to be on an equal pegging. Each Colony area represents a different part in the evolution of the Edinburgh Co-operative Building Company's (ECBC) important and successful Victorian social experiment and the development of ECBC architectural forms. Several Edinburgh Colonies were built before the ECBC was formed (Shaw's Place and Rosebank Cottages); I am glad to see them included in this exercise as they are equally deserving of protection to demonstrate the evolution of this type of housing.

Each Colony development is unique in own way but part of a holistic and distinctive evolution of form. For example, we can see how external stairs in earlier forms such as at Stockbridge evolve and change over time to an internal stair form such as at the Flower Colonies. As an example, the Flower Colonies have distinctive evolutionary changes of their own such as bay windows and subtle changes in street layout and decoration to match changing fashions and fit in with the land that the ECBC bought. Despite the inevitable changes in fashion over time, there is great cohesion in the 'Colonies look' - one larger cottage flat over a lower smaller flat; an individual front garden and entrance door for each dwelling; black, Victorian cast iron gates and clothes poles, and the quiet cobbled terraces which provide a peaceful and relaxing community environment in the city. A sense of Scottish urban place and identity is provided by ECBC plaques of the worksmens' trades who built the Colonies, commemoration plaques of the ECBC's work, and not least, the ECBC beehive emblem from which FCARA derives its own logo today.

Conservation area status for all Colonies would assist in FCARA's work to conserve the architectural value of its area. FCARA aspires to restore and repair its ECBC plaques, particularly its ECBC beehive logo. Gaining conservation status would assist enormously in architectural conservation projects like this to obtain assistance and funding.

Notwithstanding those paragraphs above, conservation area status is using a stick rather than a carrot to protect Colonies areas. It would be preferable that local authority planning officials recognised the historic importance of special buildings such as the Colonies without the necessity of the buildings being protected in some



Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association

<http://flowercolonies.org.uk>

specific way. However FCARA's experience clearly demonstrates that CEC planners cannot be relied on in this way, and this is why we have worked hard to accelerate and attain conservation area status for all Colonies.

Specifically FCARA members are very disappointed that planning permission was recently granted for a site in the Flower Colonies for two blocks of five storey student flats. The planning application was wisely dismissed by the CEC councillors on the planning committee; the committee being in agreement with FCARA members that whilst improvements had been made on previous applications due to energetic campaign work by FCARA and affiliates, a great more could be done to make it more cohesive with a Colonies area. Despite this democratic decision, the Scottish Government Reporter decided differently in the appeal made by the developer.

FCARA members find it troubling that the CEC officials fully support conservation area status for the Flower Colonies on one hand, whilst simultaneously advocating unsightly planning applications for Colonies areas such as that described to the planning committee - which will not fit with the principles of the conservation area. No doubt the argument will be made that the planning application was lodged before the conservation area consultations were launched - but this ignores the fact that some Colonies are protected already proving that Colonies are recognised for their historic importance. The purpose of this consultation is not to recognise the Colonies as important for the first time, but to protect all Colonies as a whole with recognition that the work is long overdue. It is very important that Colonies are protected from any further damaging developments such as those recently granted in the Flower Colonies. This is why we fully support these proposals whilst regretting that they are necessary.

Suggestions for improvement of conservation area proposals

Although FCARA is supportive of the conservation area proposals as a whole, we would argue that some small additions should be made before conservation area status is granted.

Firstly we would argue that the section of the old Caledonian railway line that forms a perimeter of the Flower Colonies Area be included in the proposed Flower Colonies Conservation Area. The main reason for our proposal is that historically it is part and parcel of the context and history of the Flower Colonies Area.

Colonies were often built next to industrial features like railways because the workers from those areas had the greatest need of Colonies houses and also because the ECBC could buy the land for a cheaper price. I have heard anecdotal tales from older



Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association

<http://flowercolonies.org.uk>

Colonies residents of train travellers walking up Colonies terraces with their suitcases so as to board the train at Merchiston Station behind the Flower Colonies. Colonies are a product of the Industrial Revolution; they encapsulate its social values and aspirations (and to a certain extent, industrialists' philanthropy) within a terrace setting.

Nowadays, the steam trains and their passengers are gone but the rail line provides a much valued green belt resource of mature trees and walkway in a densely built up area of Edinburgh. This green belt of mature trees forms part of the pleasant and peaceful Flower Colonies atmosphere, creating privacy from surrounding tenements. Conservation area status would allow these mature trees to be protected and add greatly to the 'urban village' quality of the Flower Colonies Conservation Area.

Finally, there is a precedent for including the Caledonian rail line in the Flower Colonies Conservation Area – our next door neighbour Colonies in Shandon have part of the same line in their existing Conservation Area. So we see no reason why these two different Shandon Colonies areas should have different treatments in their conservation areas.

We welcome that the Victorian biscuit factory is included in the Flower Colonies Conservation Area as it ensures a joined up Flower Colonies Area as we define it as a Residents' Association. This remnant of the Victorian industrial age is as indicative of the Colonies era as the railway and the terraced Colonies themselves. Adding the railway and recognising its current environmental amenity value as part of our area as we do as residents would be greatly appreciated, and again would help us as an association to facilitate improvements to it to be enjoyed for all who use the area.

Secondly, we would argue that the size dimensions given for sheds in the draft Colonies Conservation Area in the character appraisals are far too restrictive, do not take account of the practicalities of living in a Colony house and are not necessary.

Page 37 of the Character Appraisal document in relation to Colonies gardens states; 'The height of garden sheds is limited to 1.5 metres and the volume is 2.25 cubic metres'. **FCARA thinks that this statement should be removed.**

In order to understand our opposition to this proposal, you need to understand that Colonies houses are not very big. They are not as big as most tenements with the same number of bedrooms, and they are certainly not as big as bungalows or villas. They do not have a shared tenement style stairwell to store things, they do not have big gardens and they do not have large amounts of storage space in the Colony house. So



Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association

<http://flowercolonies.org.uk>

where do you store your tools, DIY materials, garden pots, miscellaneous gear for hobbies, etc? Yes – in the shed!

You also need to understand that space for motorised vehicles is limited on Colonies terraces and so Colonies inhabitants often have bicycles (and more than one per household). As the Colonies are in central areas of the city, it makes sense to have a bicycle to get around and this is encouraged by CEC as a sustainable transport form. So we use our sheds for several bicycles as well as everything else that you can't fit in your small Colonies house.

Earlier Colonies forms such as Abbeyhill and Stockbridge were built with external staircases in the gardens which have storage space inside; this suggests strongly that the builders of the Colonies always envisioned that a working family would have need of external storage space to store tools, bicycles, etc. Colonies without external staircases have sheds and this is arguably a part of the 'Colonies look'.

This statement may have been inserted on the basis that CEC officials were concerned that sheds would be built too big and take over too much garden. However, our experience as Colony inhabitants is that this would not happen and it is best to let Colonies people choose what size of shed they need without restriction. After all, they are only a temporary structure and will be replaced every ten years or so to meet the needs of their owners.

FCARA would like to see a more flexible statement that reflects the needs of Colonies residents for external storage space and ensures local residents are consulted adequately, and we suggest the following alternative:

'Where the City of Edinburgh Council believe that the presence or size of sheds in any individual colonies area is detracting significantly from the conservation value of that area, they may make particular specifications about the size, volume or other features of sheds in that area, but only after consulting with local people who would be affected by the specification, the Community Council and, where in existence, the local residents' association or other body representing local people's interests. In such case all people in the area to be covered by the specification must be consulted by post, and the consultation period must not be less than 30 working days. In making any such specifications, the City of Edinburgh Council shall take account of the needs of local people for the storage of bicycles and other personal items, as well as the storage of fuel and other items necessary to ensure reasonable maintenance of house and garden.'

Thirdly, we note the guidelines on dormer windows in the draft Colonies Conservation Appraisal. This states that new dormers are only acceptable when



Flower Colonies Area Residents' Association

<http://flowercolonies.org.uk>

in the style of Colonies. We agree with this but argue guidance should be extended to entirely prevent the building of any other protruding features that could potentially damage the Colonies look. An example of this would be balconies which would not be appropriate and would disrupt the flow of the Colonies architecture in a damaging manner.

Finally, FCARA would like to thank CEC for the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation. We do fully support the protection that conservation area status will give to Edinburgh Colonies, and ask that our proposals for improvement are considered. As in the process of creating the draft Character Appraisals, I would be delighted to discuss any element of this submission with CEC officials, particularly with a view to facilitating our three suggestions for minor improvements to this otherwise excellent Character Appraisal document.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Goldsmith

Chair, FCARA

[http://flowercolonies.org.uk/](http://flowercolonies.org.uk)