

Blacket Association: Annual Report – 2008 / 2009

It seems like no time has passed since the preparation of last year's papers but during this period of doom and gloom in the wider world it also seemed at times that time stood still. That was certainly the case in relation to the restoration of the damaged Blacket Pillar at the junction of Blacket Avenue with Dalkeith Road, but that was finally reinstated on site in March. Worryingly the Area Roads Manager continues to try to disclaim responsibility for any of the Pillars and this is of particular concern as there was a further collision in September - again by an unidentified large lorry or van - which caused some damage to the top of the Pillar. Protection of the Pillars from future damage falls within the wider concerns about the volume of through Traffic and the dangers of excessive speed, and these were tackled by undertaking traffic flow surveys during a week in June. A report on those surveys will be presented at the AGM as a basis for discussion about further action. In relation to Parking the proposed short additional section of double-yellow restriction on the north side of Mayfield Terrace at the Dalkeith Road end was introduced in August. Although it did not directly affect Blacket the consultation exercise undertaken by the Council regarding a proposed southward extension of the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) has resulted in different proposals being explored and this has led to a delay in developing modifications to existing parking arrangements, in particular the expansion of shared-use of parking bays for residents and 'paid parking'.

Open Gardens

The traditional Open Gardens evening was held in late June and was again very popular and successful despite less than ideal weather. As always we are indebted to the owners who made their gardens available and hope that these events can continue in future years. In the public domain the Blacket Landscape Project is now predominantly at the maintenance stage but 3 trees were planted by the Council this year following the loss of 2 mature trees last year. The Council has also completed the recording and tagging of all the trees and have supplied us with the details.

Neighbourhood Watch

The collection of contact details for Neighbourhood Watch communication purposes has been continuing during the year but fortunately there has been little recent requirement for 'alerts' to residents. This can partly be attributed to low levels of reported crime in and around our area although there has been a break in the supply of monthly police reports this summer as a consequence of other pressures on community policing manpower. The positive aspect of the current situation is that greater interest among residents in being part of Neighbourhood Watch enhances vigilance against crime to everyone's benefit.

Planning and Licensing

There have been changes this year to both Planning and Licensing procedures as a result of the implementation at local level of Scottish Government legislative changes. The new Licensing law took effect from September 2009 but preparations have involved the issuing in advance of new liquor licences. While the new arrangements place greater responsibility on licensees to ensure compliance, the Minto Hotel new licence has conditions attached which are less restrictive than the 'undertakings' with the previous license. This has already created problems and it is proposed that information be compiled and presented on the website about how to complain about breaches of

conditions. The aim of changes to Planning procedures is to have more planning applications handled without referral to councillors. However other simplifications of planning requirements do not apply in Conservation Areas where tighter controls continue to apply. Within Blacket the main concern for residents remains the undeveloped site of the former Rowans Nursing Home in Alfred Place. Nothing further is known and we can only speculate that visits made during the year may indicate there to be an interest in change of ownership. Further afield, but with the potential to affect traffic movements in the wider area, proposals have been lodged to extend and enlarge the Cameron Toll Shopping Centre.

The Website

It is to be regretted that, in recent months, it has not been possible always to update the time-relevant items on the Website. Also, that requests for more anecdotal and background information on Blacket from residents have not, so far, produced any results. However, while usage of the site appears far from intensive, the Committee's' view is that it remains a useful resource and information source. It is, therefore, hoped shortly to secure some additional volunteer or professional back-up, to ensure the time-related items are in future kept current and so some modest additional developments can be taken on board.