

Blacket Association: Annual Report – 2012 / 2013

Looking back it appears to have been a relatively quiet year within the 5 streets and it can be summarised as follows. The Highlights were firstly that the wall and fence at the Thrums Hotel were repaired at last, the works being carried out at the behest of the owner. Then we had a remarkably good turnout for the Open Garden Evening held in June, with over 100 residents at the Party Garden to enjoy a well earned Pimm's or pint of beer. Our thanks go to the Mowats, Langs and Thomsons who kindly opened their gardens for viewing, and in particular to our very welcoming hosts, John and Lindsey Garden.

The one Planning matter that has caused considerable concern to both the Committee and residents was the development in the garden of 23 Minto Street. The background to this is as follows. In 2008 the owner of 23 Minto Street was granted planning permission to erect a cottage at the bottom of his garden; this cottage has access from Mayfield Terrace. The approved plans were fully in keeping with other buildings within the Blacket Conservation Area. In March 2013, just within the 5 year limit, the owner started building work. The cottage has now been built and, only in general shape, does it resemble the original proposal - almost all of the major elements that made it fit in so well with its surroundings have been changed.

Only after the building work had been started, did the owner apply for Minor Variations Approval but this was after an enquiry from the Association had prompted the Council to start a Planning Enforcement action as it was obvious that the building being constructed did not match the approved plans. As construction neared completion and before the minor variations had been approved, it was observed by residents that the cottage was a thorough distortion of what had originally been approved.

However under the current Planning Application process, the Planning officer responsible for approving the changes under delegated powers had no need to refer the matter higher up the chain of command; furthermore because he accepted the changes as minor variations, there was no explicit requirement to re-advertise the proposal. There is no appeal against the decision. The Blacket Association committee is now considering what further action it can take. Whatever that may be it will not be possible to change what has been allowed at 23 Minto Street. It can only be hoped that we will be able to make it much less likely that a similar situation will arise again.

We are represented on the Grange and Prestonfield Community Council (GPCC), which meets 10 times a year. We plan to put a link to the Community Council website on the Blacket website to enable residents to read the minutes of the meetings, as there are a number of things which have an influence on the Blacket area. Should any resident wish a particular issue to be raised at the meetings, please bring it to the attention of the committee.

Finally, we continue the reallocation of tasks within the Committee structure. The aim is to ensure that everyone one within the group has responsibility for a particular area, and that the load is shared evenly. We are not quite there yet, but would hope to publish the committee members and the areas they look after in the next newsletter. This will allow residents to get in touch with the person most able to address any queries or issues they may have.

Neighbourhood Watch

It is gratifying to report that House crime and Car crime figures have been lower this year. There was lead stolen from a wall in Blacket Avenue in February, and a burglary at the east end of Mayfield Terrace while the residents were on holiday in April. The burglar alarm had not been set - a warning to us all - but fortunately nothing much was taken. In August, some windows of a house in Dalkeith Road were smashed while the resident was out. The neighbours were alerted by the burglar alarm and no entry was gained.

Likewise, nothing of significance in the way of car crime has been reported, possibly because people are more careful or car security is getting more sophisticated. But we need to be alert to the "new" crime of Scamming which can occur on the doorstep; by telephone; or on the computer. We issued various 'alerts' from NW Scotland to make residents aware of the various current scams as well as the number of 'alerts' sent out by NW Scotland, the Police and the Trading Standards Agency in the latter six months of the year.

Amongst other matters, David Jenkins, NW coordinator in North Blacket Place, undertook to liaise with the Council over the removal of graffiti in the area, including a swastika on one of the pillars. The 20mph limit is now mandatory throughout Blacket as well as elsewhere but, as yet, breaking this limit does not attract penalty points. Following complaints that this limit was being flouted in the rush hour, PC Lynsey Collins instigated monitoring by Traffic Police in Blacket Avenue and Mayfield Terrace. This exercise could be repeated

PC Lynsey Collins is now our only member of the Community Policing Team, which is the new name for NW. Her e-mail is lynsey.collins@scotland.pnn.police.uk. As you will be aware, there is only one Police force in Scotland now which has the website www.scotland.police.uk. There is no longer a police news letter. The relevant telephone numbers are :

999 for an EMERGENCY 101 for any other matter

BLACKET SHRUBBERY REPORT

One of the charms of Blacket is the landscaped area on each side of the Avenue echoed in the smaller areas to the north and south. Up till 1996 there were mostly no kerbs between the road and the shrubbery. What we had was a place to dump rubbish and park cars. This was a sad state for an avenue originally leading to the now demolished Blacket House and having 200 year old trees.

Under the auspices of the Blacket Association, the late Tom Henney set up a working party. We reached agreement with the local authority that we would become responsible for maintenance of the Shrubbery. This is a partnership and the Council installed granite kerb stones; supplied us with some of the bulbs we required; and made a grant to enable us to add fencing where required. We have since then been able to rely on the positive help of the Parks Department at all times. What has been achieved, reflects well on the Council as well as our community.

We have since bought and planted 15000 bulbs plus shrubs as well as rowan, oak, lime, holly and beech trees. Much has not flourished. The trees block off the sun and drain the moisture. While daffodils and crocosmia died, vinca and snowdrops, and to an extent bluebells have done quite well. We have not, until now, been responsible for the semi circular area on the north of the avenue on

the corner with Minto Street. The Council have cleared it and we propose to plant shrubs bulbs and climbing plants. Some of these will be donated by the Council.

The original plan in the Georgian period was Rus in Urbe [countryside in the town] and we try to replicate that. However Bertram and Elspeth Zank have for a very long time cultivated the part of the Shrubbery to the south of their house as a domestic garden. The combination works well and has been noted by Scotland in Bloom inspectors who have given us a prestigious award.

Now that the areas are established we do not require from volunteers the sustained backbreaking toil of the early period. However there are always new issues. An old cherry tree had to be chopped down on the north section on Blacket Place; repairs are required to fencing; the bases of the trees have to be pruned; vandals sometimes destroy; and weeds grow. Everyone is encouraged to pick up litter and prevent dogs fouling the beds. This is, among Edinburgh Neighbourhood Projects, a classic. All of us share in its success.