

## Brunstane Station

I would like to pick up an issue I tried to raise in the previous Community Council, but there were too many distractions at the time for it to receive serious attention. The headline issue is how large numbers of people can get to Portobello, but it also raises the question of the vision we have for the character and future of Portobello.

My own wish is that Portobello should have lots of visitors – to enjoy the priceless amenity of the beach and Prom, as one of the most important of Edinburgh's "lungs", and also to support our local shops and other businesses. We don't do a lot to advertise our attractions (Edinburgh is curiously neglectful of Porty), but even if we did, there remains the very significant problem of how people are to get here. When I raised this issue previously Cllr Walker said that there wasn't a problem because the Beach is "mobbed" on hot days – but we had a fantastic Summer in 2013, and the Beach was *never* "mobbed". There were huge expanses of empty sand, while in the 'glory days' people had to queue up until they could get a vacant spot on the Beach...

The transport options are:

- Car: there is hardly anywhere to park, and our streets are anyway clogged up with residents' cars; anyone coming to Porty by car will carry on to East Lothian.
- Bus: we have a great bus service, but it's painfully slow (it can take as long to get through Porty as it then takes to get all the way in to Edinburgh), and it doesn't cope well with big increases in demand (such as on hot Sundays).
- Bike: our roads are dangerous (at least two of Edinburgh's dozen "ghost bikes" represent Porty people), and the Council's decision to allow cycling on the Prom has harmed the very amenity that should be attracting visitors.
- Tram: there's not much chance of this most suitable form of transport reaching Porty while Mike Bridgman is standing four-square in the road saying "they shall not pass"! But even once he realises how good trams are, there are still the questions of time and money.
- Walking: one of Porty's key offerings is that it is a great place for walking – so people probably won't want a long walk to get here!
- Train: this was the form of transport that did most to support Portobello's economy in its fantastic heyday, and Lawrence has been working hard to get our station reopened – but he doesn't seem to be any closer to getting that in 20 years of trying. Even with Max's support, Porty won't have a train station in the foreseeable future. But there is another of Lawrence's great achievements: Brunstane.

Brunstane Station is seven minutes from Edinburgh Waverley, but of far greater significance, it is on the Borders Railway which is to be reopened in less than two years' time, and it provides the handiest non-car access to the seaside for upwards of 30,000 people, 70% of whom were found in planning surveys to be likely to use the new train service. Major housing developments along the route will see this figure increase significantly.

Most people who get on the train to head towards Edinburgh will stay on it until they reach the capital, especially as the new service is likely to open just in time for the major

Christmas attractions. Our task, should we choose to accept it, is to ensure that the travellers notice Brunstane on the way through, and make a mental note to get off here next time. Two obvious ways of doing this are to make the station so unusually attractive that passers-by simply have to sit up and take notice of it; and to advertise it (and Portobello) at all the stations on the route.

Scotrail encourages local communities to adopt their station, which in the case of a plain simple station like ours means that they will pay for some simple features such as tubs of flowers if the community will maintain them. A couple living near the station have taken on this role, but I have found a professional landscape gardener who lives in Portobello and who would like to do much more for the station. Her vision is to spend thousands of pounds (!) on a self-sustaining display of wild-flowers, and we would also need emphatic signage to say that this is the station for the seaside.

As well as this, I would hope to see a striking poster on display at each of the nine stations on the route, perhaps produced by a Community Council competition. This would have a QR code which would link through to Bob's Porty Online website where people could readily see what we offer, in terms of local shops, eateries, 'drinkerries' and accommodation. In my dreams I would like to see a webcam giving a live feed of the Beach and Prom, and an automated weather station giving actual weather information alongside a conventional forecast. (I would like us to collect such weather records and publicise them, if – as I believe they would – they show that Porty's weather is a bit better than the local average because of our microclimate.)

This would all cost money, but I hope sponsorship could be found from the Community Council, the Amenity Society, local traders, the Rotary Club (who have already adopted Newcraighall and are interested in Brunstane), the City Council, Scotrail, and The Range (the large home-and-garden 'superstore' right beside Brunstane).

The other main issue is to make sure that people who get off the train at Brunstane have a good experience of Portobello. The location of the station is not ideal, and the (1km) walk to the Prom down Brunstane Road is not the best, though at least visitors will be able to see the sea all the way. Clearly a pedestrian crossing at Milton Road would need to be reinstated, and good signage provided all the way. Once on the Prom the existing (though by then updated) Tourist Fingerposts would take over.

Two major issues that would then have to be addressed are dogs and bikes, and this is why Brunstane station represents the important choice we have about Portobello's future: is it to become once again an important recreational amenity for people, or is it just a suburb for the convenient exploitation of residents and commuters?

My own view is that the Beach should be emphatically dog-free from Joppa Rocks to King's Road. Quite a few people bring their dogs by car and could just as easily go further west. Dogs on the Prom should be kept at all times on a short lead, which would force their owners to be aware of the mess they make. (My niece stayed with us a couple of weeks ago and took her one-year-old toddler for a walk on the beach; within minutes, a big black dog rushed up to the little girl and frightened her off the beach, and she never returned to it. Her experience would be the equivalent of a horse running up to an adult for nose-to-nose contact...)

I have always supported considerate cycling on an empty(ish) Prom, but many cyclists now ride along it quite quickly, and clearly resent pedestrians who get in their way. When I was young, the seaside was a place for children, and if we were doing things properly

today we would restore this important 'birthright' – in which case children would be able to run down Brunstane Road and on to the beach, not having to look right or left for cyclists, and without the slightest danger of being frightened by a dog – or indeed by the veritable pack of dogs that one sometimes sees on our Beach.

I ask the Community Council to embrace this important opportunity to restore Portobello's image as a place of fun and joy, to adopt Brunstane Station, and to do everything it can to make visitors feel very welcome.