**Portobello Amenity Society**

4a, Elcho Terrace, Edinburgh, EH 15 2EF, 4th August, 2017

Kirsty-Louise Campbell,

Senior Manager, Strategy and Insight,

City of Edinburgh Council

Dear Ms Campbell,

**Participation Request 14934 – Pitz sale, Portobello**

Thank you for your letter of 17th July 2017. Portobello Amenity Society has reviewed the process as outlined and wishes to make the following points.

**Online Survey**

PAS supports the Council’s position on the use of an online survey. We agree that surveys often do not allow people to say exactly what they would like to say and limit people’s full expression of their views. Focus groups, in our view, would allow people greater freedom to express exactly what they think and would also allow them to hear and to respond to the views of other members of the group.

**Focus Groups**

PAS welcomes the opportunity to be included in the two focus groups reserved for members of community organisations who have expressed a wish to take part in this process. We would hope that a diverse group of community organisations can be represented, including representatives from the mosque as they are adjacent to the site.

We do have concerns with the way in which the ‘designated Portobello area’ has been decided which will determine possible participants for the four or five groups for residents who do not live in the immediate area of the site. PAS would argue that residents of Wakefield Avenue for example should be eligible for inclusion in these groups as they are nearer to the site than people who live in Joppa. We would prefer a defined radius being drawn round the site rather than allocation by post code. Similarly we would suggest that Craigentinny CC should be asked if they wish to participate in the two focus groups reserved for community organisations.

It is suggested that one of the locations at which the professional recruiter should be positioned should be directly opposite the Westbank site, near to the supermarket. PAS would argue that this position would be likely to attract people visiting Aldi who have come to Portobello by car and who do not necessarily live within the Portobello area. A better position, in the society’s view, at which the professional recruiter could be positioned, would be further east, in the vicinity of the Town Hall where the recruiter is more likely to meet people who live in the local area.

**Renumeration**

PAS would not wish payment for taking part in a focus group and we would think that other community groups wishing to take part in this exercise would share our view that such an exercise is part of what community groups would do anyway as part of their wish to better their community.

**Discussion Guide**

In the ‘Background and introduction’ section, the society believes that the proposal needs to be placed fully in context. It should be stated that the site is currently designated as open space and that, when the open air swimming pool was demolished, the Council gave local people an assurance that the site would remain as open space in perpetuity.

The ‘Background and introduction’ also clearly indicates that the land will be sold for housing. If the purpose of having focus groups is genuine engagement with local residents to encourage them to express their views in an open manner then it is surely counterproductive to begin the process with this very prescriptive statement.

The discussion guide mentions the fact that the sale of the site will go towards the development of the new Meadowbank Stadium but it does not give focus groups the opportunity to discuss the ways in which the sale of land currently zoned as open space should provide ‘community benefit’ to residents of Portobello. The society believes that selling land in Portobello, zoned and used as open space, to maintain an existing asset for all in Edinburgh, does not fulfil the remit of providing community benefit for Portobello residents. Focus group participants should be given the opportunity to discuss how they feel the people of Portobello should benefit from the sale of this site.

**Evaluation Session**

It is not up to either PCC or PAS to decide which organisations should participate in an evaluation session. If PAS is invited to take part in this we are happy to do so.

**Portobello Community Council**

In the PCC review of this process, Geoff Lynn states that PCC members should be present to observe all of the focus groups and take notes of what is being discussed and the ways in which group participants express their views. PAS is strongly of the view that this should not be the case as the presence of observers would constrain open discussion which is the whole purpose of the exercise.

PCC also wants to ‘interpret’ the results of the focus group discussions to provide input into their proposed online survey **before** the report on the focus group findings is published in mid September. This would pre-empt the findings of the report and would be highly inadvisable. PCC does not have the professional knowledge and expertise to ‘report’ on the findings of the focus group sessions. This should be left to those qualified to do so.

**Portobello Amenity Society**

Geoff Lynn, in the PCC’s review of the process, states that PAS is ‘a special interest group’, is ‘in no way an impartial body or one seeking to represent the views of the community as a whole’. This is not the case. PAS has a long record as a respected group which has supported the views of the community. For example, PAS backed the community campaign to prevent a superstore being built on the North Baileyfield site. PAS also backed a community campaign to prevent a waste transfer site being built by Viridor off the Sir Harry Lauder Road. Both cases went to public inquiry at which PAS gave evidence and in both cases the developer’s appeal was rejected by the Reporter. PAS was also asked by the planning department to write most of the original Character Appraisal for the Portobello Conservation Area. Recently, PAS was asked, as was PCC, to help with the revised Character Appraisal, which PAS did.

PAS welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the Outcome Improvement Process and hopes that you find the above comments useful and constructive.

Yours sincerely,

John M. Stewart,

Chair, Portobello Amenity Society.