

Musselburgh Conservation Society
Minutes of the 293rd Executive Committee Meeting
held on
Monday 31st May 2021, at 7:30 pm
by
'Zoom'

1). Present.

Alan Armour (Chair & Treasurer), Alan Stevens (Planning & Correspondence), Gavin McDowall (Membership & Trips), Andrew Coulson (Minute Secretary), Barry Turner (Planning), George Cunningham, Melanie Roccio.

2). Apologies for Absence.

Camelia Symes. The Chairman welcomed George Cunningham and Melanie Roccio.

3). Co-option to Committee.

Co-option of George Cunningham to the Committee was proposed by Alan Armour, and seconded by Andrew Coulson. There was no dissent.

4). Minutes of zoomed meeting, 22 March 2021.

Minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated, and were accepted as read. There were no matters arising.

5). Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer presented a written report, which is attached to these Minutes. The report was accepted without dissent.

6). Planning Report.

Alan Stevens outlined recently new Planning Applications, and summarised his response on behalf of the Society:

21/00367/P & 21/00409/LBC: 19 Bridge Street, Replacement Windows. *Comment made on sash pattern to be more sympathetic to its listed building status.*

21/00183/P: 30 New Street, Erection of 2 houses. Infill site behind Victorian cottage. *Comment made on window proportions.*

The Committee agreed that the scale, size and location of the development represented a good use of the available site, although they considered that the detailed design was not particularly suited to the existing Victorian cottage.

21/00412/P: 21 Eskside West, Conversion of office into 4 flats.

The Committee agreed that the proposed conversion of this well-designed relatively modern office block into 4 flats represented a very good re-use of the building, which will hardly change the external appearance (except to move the entrance door from the street to the pend). The question was raised of whether the site included ownership of adequate car-parking space.

21/00429/LBC: 29 Dalrymple Loan, Alteration to house & formation of dormers. *A sympathetic refurbishment of a significant and attractive Musselburgh building.*

21/00528/PM: Land at Old Craighall, Erection of Crematorium & associated works.

The Committee noted that the East Lothian Council project ‘Musselburgh Active Toun’ was in the process of inviting all residents to an on-line consultation on development of ‘new and improved spaces for walking, wheeling and cycling’, including two specific through routes, from Old Craighall to Goose Green, and from Edinburgh Road to Loretto Corner, and a Mobility Hub around the Brunton Hall. The Committee agreed that these extensive and detailed proposals required careful and detailed consideration, and Barry Turner agreed to co-ordinate the Society’s response to the plans.

Barry Turner said that a Reporter had now been appointed to consider the Appeal by Macdonald’s against the refusal of planning permission to build an outlet in the Tesco car park. Melanie Roccio said that she had submitted a petition with 1400 signatures against the development.

Appointment of a Reporter for the Goshen Farm application was still awaited. Andrew Coulson reminded the Committee that Historic Environment Scotland had raised an objection to the earlier Goshen Farm proposal, on the grounds that the marching camp of the English invading force in 1547 was probably located in this area and that significant archaeology might well be lost under residential development. In the interim, the developers had commissioned a thorough archaeological survey, which found nothing of interest. In consequence, the Environmental Impact Assessment for the current proposal asserted that there are no historical or cultural connections for the site, and HES have made no objection to it. Arguments against the proposal must therefore rest on Green Belt, etc, issues, and not on preservation of the battlefield.

Andrew Coulson also described what he thought were the implications for the preservation/conservation of Pinkie Cleugh battlefield, of the current round of revision of the National Battlefields Inventory. The Chairman asked him to provide a written summary, and this document is appended to these Minutes.

7). Membership Report.

Gavin McDowall reported that 85 people had become fully-paid members of the Society, in the course of the year, and that another 2 -3 had joined late in the year, and their subscriptions had been remitted. He responded to the Treasurer’s proposal that an increase in the subscription rate should be considered, to avoid a predictable loss occurring next year, by suggesting that a small loss might be accepted, in the interests of recovering from the membership effects of Covid-19 regulations.

In the same context, George Cunningham said that he would be prepared to make regular Press Releases concerning the Society’s activities, and this commitment was warmly welcomed by the Committee.

8). Correspondence.

No significant correspondence had been received.

9). “Love Musselburgh”

Melanie Roccio explained that the “Love Musselburgh” triangular signs to be seen in Musselburgh streets were part of her collaborative project with the local business partnership to promote the idea of ‘shopping ‘locally’ in one of the many small businesses in the town. Her particular interest is in making Musselburgh a pretty place to live – her first project had been with a few friends, to re-paint picnic tables on Musselburgh seafront in pastel colours, using paint recycled at no cost from the Wallyford recycling centre: and many people had told her that this produced a positive response and improvement in that setting, out of all proportion to the effort and cost involved.

A current project is the re-cycling of a derelict phone box near the Roman Bridge, which she will convert into a planter with a variety of flowers trailing through the old window slots.

She also emphasised the community value of bringing people together to help with improving the local environment.

Other members of the committee raised the issue of the worsening dereliction of ‘The Stand’ pub, located on the opposite side of the street from the Old Town Hall and the Tollbooth. The building is located within Musselburgh Conservation Area, and may be one of the oldest buildings on the High Street.

10). Speakers for 2021 – 22 season.

The Chairman reported that the list of confirmed speakers for the next season of lectures was as follows:

2021

14TH October – Liz Hunter on – “Active Travel Initiatives in and around Musselburgh”

11th November – Roger Crofts on “Esk Valley – Working with Nature for a better future”

9th December – Ruth Boreham on “Christmas in the Trenches”

2022

13th January

10th February – Helena Gray on “East Lothian Archaeology”

10th March – Victoria Robb on “Mining East Lothian’s Past”

14th April – Dr. Jan Bondeson – “Phillimore’s Postcards of East Lothian”

Several tentative suggestions were made for filling the remaining slot.

11). 2020 Design award

The Chairman reported that there had been no progress on the installation of the award plaque on the plinth of the ‘Archer’ statue.

12). Date of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next committee meeting were provisionally arranged as 7:30 pm on 28 June, at Alan Armour’s home.

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR C'TEE MEETING

31/5/21

The balance at the bank is £3073.42 according to the latest statement I have from the bank. The surplus for the year to date is £394.49. However, we have to take into account certain items which have either disappeared or appeared during lockdown year to arrive at this figure.

On the income side for last year the total was £992 made up of: £858 subs, £71 donations and £63 visitor fees. This year the total income is £1221.36 made up of £860 subs, £230 donations, £31.36 refund of insurance premium and £100 refund from Muss. Area Partnership for a donation unused (the last 2 being non-repeating).

Expenditure missing from this year is the insurance premium which last year was £208.60, hire of the hall at £175 and AGM and Christmas wine £122.82 which includes the audit fee. However, we did give the church a £100 donation and appearing is one non-repeatable zoom cost of around £145 (including May fees).

With a loss of £226.95 for last year, I expect this year a surplus, with few costs left to appear. One thing which might arrive sometime is the fee for the web page which is around £100+ but I do not know when.

Analysis would suggest we are likely to make our usual loss in 2021-22 as expenditure returns to normal unless the membership goes up to at least 100 and donations are as generous. Thought has to be given to an increase in the subscription. All assuming covid-19 restrictions are gone.

Alan Armour - Treasurer

Pinkie Cleugh, the Battlefield Inventory, Conservation, & Planning.

At the end of April, I was invited (I think through the good offices of Arran Johnston) to sit in on a discussion organised by Historic Environment Scotland, and involving HES staff with responsibility for the Battlefields Inventory, history and archaeology researchers (the latter principally from AOC archaeology, who have carried out many of these studies in connection with proposed local developments) – and Andy Robertson, the East Lothian Council archaeologist, who of course advises EL planners on these aspects of development applications.

These experts may often find themselves on opposite sides of, for example, planning appeals: so, to encourage free discussion, no ‘official’ conclusions or minutes came out of the meeting, and I think the HES staff also felt able to discuss aspects of government policy a little more freely than usual. So that’s to say that I think we should treat what I say about these discussions as essentially private information: there’s also the point that I may well have misunderstood particular points that were made.....!

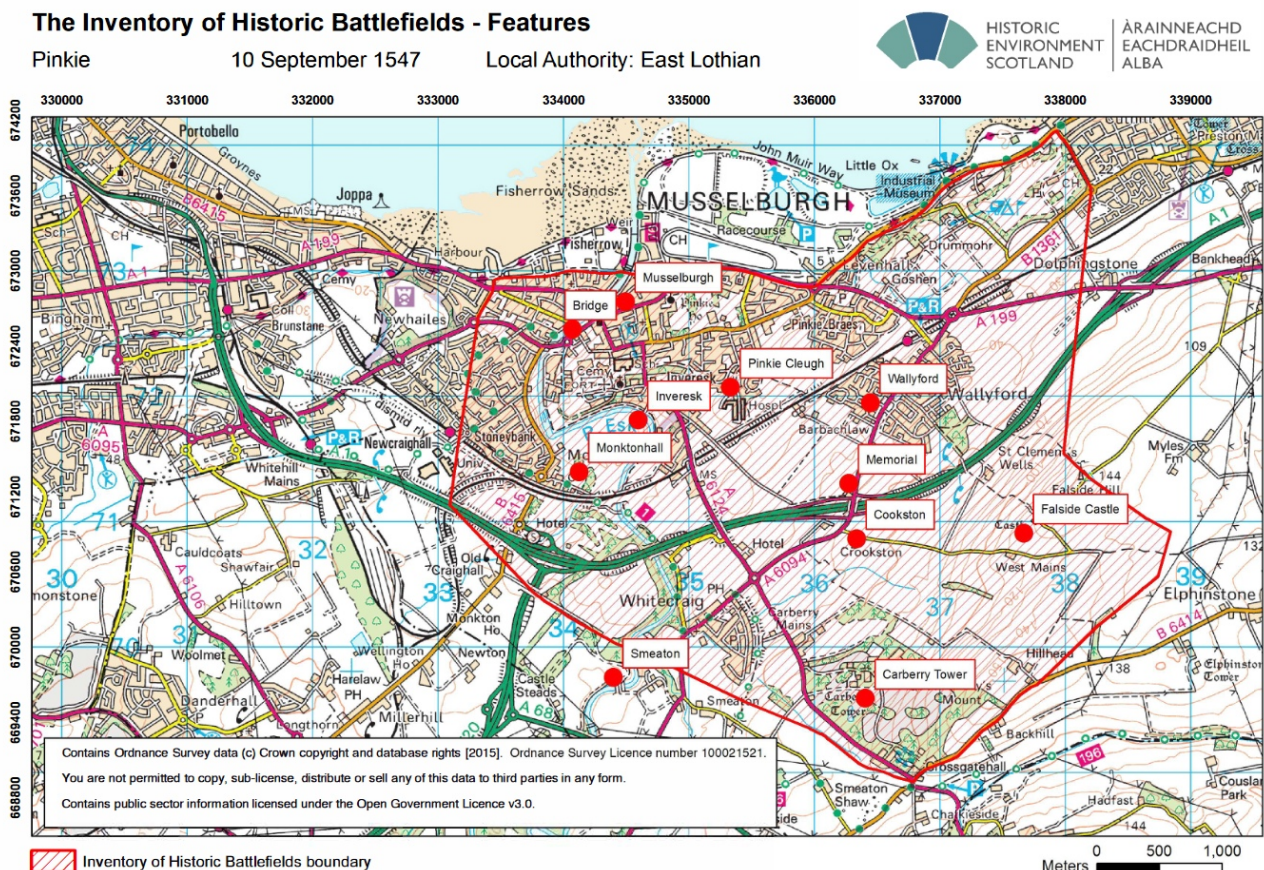
One of the occasions for the meeting, was that a new revised version of the Pinkie Cleugh entry in the Battlefield Inventory will soon be published for statutory public consultation. Inventory entries have now acquired considerable importance for battlefield conservation and management, because it is generally recognised that the original Scottish Government policy for battlefield conservation – that a management scheme should be developed for each battlefield, under the aegis of the local authority, or of a specific Trust, etc, – has proved to be completely impracticable. In effect, the only ‘battlefield management’ and conservation for most battles, including Pinkie Cleugh, is articulated via the planning system.

In principle, of course, this could mean point-blank refusals of permission for any or all development within the Inventory-defined boundary of the field (though the presumption against development on our battle site has only been incorporated as a specific East Lothian Policy in the latest iteration of the Local Area Plan – and the most recent application for development at Goshen Farm, for example, was quickly slipped in before the LAP came into effect). But I think it’s fairly certain that even if the ELC planners and councillors were prepared to make such a refusal, this would not survive the appeal process. The argument would be that listing in the Inventory is intended only to make conservation into an issue *for consideration* by the developers and planners, not to allow for the forbidding of all development.

The objection that HES and ELC (and we) made to the original Goshen Farm application, was that this was the probable site of the English camp on 8 and 9 September, 1547, and that there could well be important archaeology there. [The application was lost on appeal not because of these ‘battlefield’ objections, but because the developers had incompetently overlooked the fact that the Green Belt’s purpose here is to prevent coalescence of Musselburgh with Prestonpans, and that their proposal actually itself merged the two communities]. Before putting in the second, revised, proposal, the developers commissioned (from AOC) a thorough archaeological survey, and this found that there are no interesting and relevant remains at Goshen Farm. At the same time, the developers argued that, even if the English camp was in that general area, there was no reason to identify it specifically

with Goshen Farm, rather than, say, the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club. The upshot of these manoeuvrings is that the Environmental Impact Report for the revised application says, in summary, that no ‘heritage’ issues arise from what is now proposed, and that HES have made no objection to the proposal. The conservation of the battlefield will not even be considered as an issue by the Reporter. (Of course, we can still hope that the application will be refused on the basis of other greenbelt issues, inadequate transport infrastructure, etc).

So, we can expect that, in future, ‘potential for significant archaeology’ will not be a useful argument to raise against potential development. We will probably find that major developers will have commissioned a thorough archaeological survey before submitting an application: and that if significant remains are found, the planners will only require that the site will be thoroughly excavated before it disappears under concrete and tarmac.



The Goshen Farm case illustrates the weakness of another possible approach to selective conservation – that of trying to secure complete protection of the sites of key events in the battle. There will always be some uncertainty and dispute about identifications of these sites and, over time, the consensus about locations amongst the expert historians and archaeologists may develop and change. The battle narrative that we present each year on 10 September concentrates on actions proposed to be on a line roughly from Wallyford to Inveresk: in the last decade or so, strong arguments have been made that the centre of the fighting (before the English cavalry massacre of the Scottish rout) was on much higher ground to the southeast, beyond the line of the present A1 trunk road.

It seemed to me that at the HES discussion meeting, there was a common feeling that the solution to this conundrum of what to try and protect in a battlefield, is to first define more precisely what is the purpose of conservation. If I was to try to do this, I would say that we should think of battlefields as being akin to the curated objects in a museum. Looking at such things imaginatively, and in the light of experts' interpretations of them, almost puts you in direct contact with the events of the past and the people who shaped them.

To be more specific, I think that what we can and should argue for is the preservation of aspects and features (eg sightlines) of the landscape setting of Pinkie Cleugh that allow the visitor to understand the problems and opportunities that these presented to the people who fought there in 1547, and how they responded to them.

Something that arises from taking this point of view is the importance for heritage conservation of amateur enthusiasts such as the Pinkie Cleugh Battlefield Group – there is not much point in arduously struggling to preserve a battlefield if nobody is encouraged to go and look at it, and if there is poor or no interpretation of the locations and sites when they get there. To make the same point another way, we are more likely to be able to successfully argue for the value of preserving important parts of the battlefield if there are many other members of the public whom we have brought to feel the same way.

Andrew Coulson
20/05/21