

Echoes of the Past mark Launch of Edinburgh's Newest School

The first-ever public screening of "Echoes", a film of the show to save Castlebrae High School, will take place in Craigmillar on the 10th November- the night before Edinburgh Council launches their new replacement school. For the new school exists solely thanks to the community's past battles to keep their old one, which faced closure in 2012. This production by local activists- an astounding piece of political theatre- shows people power at its best. Craigmillar campaigners believe this is an ideal time to remind present politicians just how close they were to losing the school completely.

The fight against Castlebrae's closure was led by the "Save the Brae" campaign, steered by Susan Heron and Kevin Finlay, supported by SNP Councillor Mike Bridgman (see <https://youtu.be/0JeFeJLOjg>), and assisted by Honor Flynn and Susan Carr with, in the background, Council worker Pete Gregson, who was subsequently fired by CEC for his role. Kids at the time proclaimed just how good the school was (see <https://youtu.be/vMPV90JoXsk>)

Council officers felt differently. A "Boil that needs to be lanced" screamed the Edinburgh Evening News in August 2012- but now that "boil" is set to be crowned by Edinburgh's politicians as they launch Edinburgh's newest secondary school, in what must be the greatest policy reversal in Edinburgh's educational history.

The film by Pete Gregson (trained at the BBC), in a multicamera shoot and edit, resulted in a DVD copy which was given to every one of the City's Councillors at the time- and helped educate them as to what they were proposing to do. However, the film has never been publicly screened in Craigmillar, until now.

"Echoes" will be shown at Craigmillar's White House on Niddrie Mains Road at 5pm on Thursday 10th November, the night before the launch of the new Castlebrae High. It will give citizens the chance to learn of the dramatic story behind the gleaming new £28M school, recently completed in the most deprived part of our capital city - and to meet some of the campaigners who fought so hard to make it happen.

"Echoes" was written by the late Johnni Stanton, a Craigmillar author, and played to packed houses when it was performed at the height of the battle for Castlebrae, on 1st December 2012, in the theatre of the SPACE building at Harewood Road.

Ex- Council leader Andrew Burns had famously declared in 2008 that Labour would never close Castlebrae High School, yet but four years later his Council administration was proposing exactly that, as the Labour/SNP coalition reneged on that promise and made a mockery of New Labour's mantra of "Education, Education, Education".

The only party that stuck by Save the Brae throughout were the Greens- and it was the support of their six Councillors along with rebels in the Labour and SNP that finally swung the case. Labour were, in truth, split- Save the Brae was backed by Edinburgh East Labour MP Sheila Gilmore and Labour MSP Kezia Dugdale. Other notable supporters were Green MSP Alison Johnstone and Edinburgh arts activists Irvine Welsh and Richard de Marco.

But everything pivoted around the passion, commitment, intelligence, humour, vision and guts of the local people who worked as one to Save The Brae. The campaigners deserve to be celebrated as the new school opens- a marvellous building that will be a keystone in Craigmillar's regeneration. The battle to Save the Brae is the stuff of legend- as this video shows.

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For tickets and more info- contact Pete Gregson on 0758 472 2191 or email peter.n.gregson@outlook.com or ring Susan Heron on 07815 207366

The video lasts 43 minutes and can be found on You-Tube at <https://youtu.be/FlkCtgjCsXs>

More at www.kidsnotsuits.com/campaigns/save-the-brae-plea

Editor's Notes

Castlebrae Community High School faced closure back in 2012 and there were no plans to build a replacement. Edinburgh Council Education mandarins had decided that in future, Craigmillar's young people would be bussed to Portobello High and other neighbouring schools. That plan fell flat on its face on 14th March 2013 when the Portobello High School head boy told a full Council meeting that doing so would be a disaster for the educational prospects of Craigmillar's youth. That Council meeting, the longest ever, ran for over seven hours as deputation after deputation told Edinburgh's ruling Labour/SNP coalition that their proposal to close Castlebrae was wrong in every way; it left some Councillors in tears as local folk made their feelings clear. A historic decision that day to reject schools' education chief Mike Rosendale's recommendation for closure, paved the way for the new Castlebrae that will be launched on the 11th November. Mr Rosendale is unlikely to be on the guest list.

It was a vicious and hard-fought struggle and one which Labour's present Education Convener Joan Griffiths is unlikely to allude to, as Labour Councillors line up to claim plaudits for a school they were planning to close but ten years prior; even then, in spite of the present Head Teachers claims, it was phenomenally successful, ranking sixth on the Council's league table of secondary schools, in terms of the record numbers of students that the school moved into jobs, training or FE ([more here](#)).

The argument for closing the school centred around its low roll, at around 200 pupils. The Council claimed this was due to its poor reputation (ignoring its own data which showed the opposite) but the school was certainly in a poor state of repair, having been built quickly cheaply and quickly in 1976. But the main reason for the low roll was the stalled regeneration of the area.

For there had been widescale demolition by the Council of homes which led to decrease in the number of 10-15 year olds in the Craigmillar area, from 1,297 in 1996 to 874 in 2012 and this, combined with a historically low birth-rate in 2000 and repeated threats to the school, had led to an erosion of confidence amongst parents which largely accounted for the fall in the school roll. The Council ignored all these factors in its efforts to paint Castlebrae as a failing school.

The play was performed 4 months after the Council, under Education Convener Cllr Paul Godzik, had launched a consultation proposing the community school's closure. Godzik's Head of Schools, Mike Rosendale, considered savings from closing Castlebrae High would help shore up the hole he'd created in his budget when his scheme to build the new Portobello High School on public parkland led to unexpectedly high opposition and a court case that the Council lost. A Government act was needed to get Portobello High through Planning and Rosendale was struggling to find cash. Closing Castlebrae would be easy, he thought. But no community has ever fought as hard as Craigmillar did and Rosendale, with a string of successful school closures behind him, must have thought Craigmillar would be a pushover. How wrong he was.