



Green Group of Councillors: Report for August - September 2012

Steve Burgess

The main issue dominating business over the last month has been a review of how councillors oversee the work of the Council. I'm glad to report that the key Green concern about over-centralisation of decision-making has been heeded. The new structure includes a Green manifesto ask - a new Petitions Committee - which it has been agreed will be chaired by a Green councillor. This is the first time a Green councillor will take up the role of convenor in a main Council committee. Linked to the Governance Review, the first Council webcast began in September, another Green initiative.

At a policy level we have been supportive of Council overtures to brand Edinburgh as a 'Co-operative Council' but we've stressed this must mean real action on the ground not just re-badging of existing projects. We helped secure a stay of execution for a community buy-out of Leith Waterworld but this still hangs in the balance (see Chas' report below). We also won Council backing for a Sir Chris Hoy Cycle Network as a permanent legacy for Olympic successes; and achieved a modest u-turn on council attitudes to energy efficiency standards in private homes. Finally, we have been continuing to develop our longer-term plans to mesh with the Branch Plan.

In Southside/Newington ward good progress is being made on replacing the outdoor kick-pitch at the Crags sports centre. Before winter sets in, I'm chasing up a council promise to install a bus shelter for older residents on West Savile Terrace. Following complaints to me at Preston Street parents forum, last week Environmental wardens distributed anti-dog fouling postcards to neighbouring properties. The email box continues to be very full!

Nigel Bagshaw

As the sole Green on the Planning Committee I fought against the scaling back of developer contributions to local infrastructure improvements and the tram project through 'Section 75' agreements. I went with a delegation of city councillors to meet the Standards Commission in the Scottish Parliament to help reverse the ban on ward councillors addressing the planning committee in support of local communities, and took part in a full-day planning tour of North Edinburgh and Leith Docks to look into future development plans for the area and the potential for offshore wind turbine production there.

As a member of the Tram Oversight Group I was briefed on the progress of the project but am still concerned at the lack of independent information available. On the Transport Committee I put forward motions seeking to provide public transport alternatives to an extension of free city centre parking and to give full priority to road safety over additional parking facilities in Morningside, but was rounded defeated on both counts. On a more

positive note I was pleased to attend a presentation of Transform Scotland's "Warning Signs" report setting out recommendations for investment requirements in the Scottish Budget and suggesting priorities for action for Nicola Sturgeon.

Ward-wise I helped secure a change in the amount of lets charged for the use of Blackhall school premises, lent support to a campaign to keep a much respected alcohol recovery centre at Malta House in Stockbridge, and actively backed tenants in a sheltered housing scheme to secure existing levels of service provision, at least for the next couple of years.

Finally, one Sunday I joined a group of council cyclists, including fellow Green councillor Chas Booth and the Labour leader Andrew Burns, on the Pedal for Scotland cycle ride from Glasgow to Edinburgh (and even managed to raise a couple of quid for 'Freedom from Torture')

Chas Booth

Leith Waterworld has dominated both the council and ward agenda in recent weeks. We were delighted to learn that Splashback, the group aiming to run the pool as a community enterprise, were the only bidder for the site, but deeply disappointed that council officials had recommended rejection of their bid. Following intensive pressure on the administration we managed to turn that recommendation around, so that full council on 20 September agreed to work co-operatively over the next four months to develop the Splashback business plan. We urged the administration to go further and offer some financial support to Splashback, but what has been offered is a good start. The next four months will therefore be busy!

The other ward issue keeping me busy recently is the Seafield sewage works. Constituent complaints about the stink continue at a steady rate, and a report was sent to the Environment committee, which I'm a member of. I've spoken to many local residents who say that although the smell is not as bad as it was prior to 2011, it is still a nuisance. Meanwhile the report sent to Environment committee showed that for one period during April and May this year, there was an average of 6 'odour incidents' as they're called per week. The local people shouldn't have to endure that level of smell, so I've been urging robust action against Scottish Water to force them into action.

At the August meeting of full council I succeeded in getting a motion passed agreeing with the principle of establishing a Sir Chris Hoy cycle network in Edinburgh. This is an idea which was first mooted by Kim Harding from the Pedal on Parliament pressure group, and has support from the Cyclists' Touring Club, Spokes, Greener Leith and others. The proposal is to build on the current excellent network of traffic-free paths and on-road cycle lanes with a connected network of segregated on-road cycle paths on those routes which are most heavily trafficked. We know that many people would like to use a bike as their means of transport, but perceive it to be unsafe: segregated cycle paths will help to get them cycling.

Maggie Chapman

The consultation on the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill closes on 26th September, so we have been working hard to ensure the Council submits as strong a response as possible, and supports community groups to do likewise. I hosted an event

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focussed on the effective use of community assets and open spaces, and will be helping those involved pull their response together. In the Council, I proposed an amendment to strengthen the Council's own response, focussing on improving community planning structures and procedures, improving the support for community councils, reducing the bureaucracy faced by communities when seeking to use local assets, and securing proper guidance for the use of Common Good land. Sadly, the Labour/SNP coalition thought this was 'clogging up' council time and refused to give any ground.

Leith Neighbourhood Partnership is in the process of setting up Community Forums, which will replace the sub-groups we had previously. Community reactions to this have been largely positive, and I look forward to working with each of the groups as they begin to develop their plan of work for the coming years.

I sought to get the Council to state categorically that it would not be involved in any forced labour scheme, such as the ever unpopular Workfare programme. However, before it could be discussed at this month's full council meeting, the Tories decided that there might be some legal problem with my motion, and so it has been deferred by a month. This does make me think that the Tories think it should be illegal not to employ slaves ... the mind boggles!

Gavin Corbett

At a Council level the main things for me have been working with social enterprise Remade on a bid for Scotland's first community repair and re-use centre; pressing the Council on reforms to the beleaguered system for repairs to private flats; and feeding in views on a review of parent engagement in schools. On my first appearance at Regulatory Committee I raised some critical questions about the renewal of the zoo licence; and was pleased when the Committee agreed unanimously to refuse permission for a city centre march by ultra-right group, the Scottish Defence League.

At a ward level planning issues continue to dominate: from detailed work on the "section 75" legal agreement for student housing at Slateford; to long term vision for the old brewery sites at Fountainbridge; and continuing to meet community representatives about the former Napier University site at Craighouse. I've managed to make some progress with litter bins in Craiglockhart Dell; chaired the first meeting of an action group on parking in Shandon; picked up problems with planning enforcement on bike sheds; and fielded queries on the new bins service. I also took on chairing the Transport and Environment Group of South West Neighbourhood Partnership

Finally, to prove that I still have a populist bone in my body I secured Council backing to rename the Craiglockhart tennis centre after Andy Murray.

Melanie Main

In the City chambers, I am on the School Estates Forum which has met to consider how to accommodate the rising school rolls across the city (24% increase expected by 2019!). I have had to fight hard opposing officials recommendations that libraries, science, art and music rooms are not necessary, asking for detailed individual school information and calling for long-term solutions for individual schools not quick fixes. The first set of recommendations go forward in October.

With a general understanding of key issues under my belt, this has been a month of meetings and making progress on ward work. Here's a sample;

- Attended regular 8am meetings with residents and council officials in Greenbank which has resulted in a solution to major flooding after three years of frustrating inaction;
- fought for the removal of relocated Marchmont recycling centre from Bruntsfield Links and extracted a promise from Council to consult on future relocation;
- started a campaign to close the rat-run through Greenbank Road (residents meeting called for 9th October);
- met with local police inspector and agreed to host Tollcross meeting with interested parties to look at solutions to ongoing long-term antisocial behaviour;
- met with council officials to discuss Meadows and Links facilities and was pleased to see scoping of toilet provision, signage etc has now started;
- met with the Council's Economic Development and South Neighbourhood Partnership teams to discuss local shopping centres across the ward;
- met with licensing staff to request better communications with Community Council around applications;
- hosted meeting between council planners and Friends of Craighouse and sourced professional start-up help for Bruntsfield Dig-in.

I have visited all seven schools in the ward, (four primary and three secondary), and met with each Head teacher to learn about the school and discuss current issues like crumbling buildings and rising rolls, and have met with five of the seven Parent Councils at least once, taking various issues forward for them.