



# **Green Group of Councillors: Report for September - October 2012**

## **Steve Burgess**

Major issues around the Council this month have been; the botched implementation of the move to fortnightly bin collections which has generated around 1600 complaints (see Chas & Gavin below); the ongoing saga of where to build the new Portobello school also generating a lot of email and further changes to the governance of the council.

This month also saw the Lab-SNP Coalition fail on their pledge to pursue the transient visitor levy, or tourist bed-tax, when they voted-down a Green proposal to approach the Scottish Government about the idea, which could have generated up to £10m for re-investment in City infrastructure – such as re-opening Leith Waterworld !

The Cross-party working group on Climate Change has been re-convened after a year's hiatus. Officers report that the Council now has a target to reduce both City and council emissions by 42% by 2020 – this will require a step-change from what's gone on before and is one area Greens can really push on.

Meanwhile across in Southside/Newington I've been supporting a group who are keen to have a 'pump' cycle track in a small piece of unused woodland on the Southside. There's a consultation event at Craggs sports centre on Saturday 3rd November, 2pm.

## **Nigel Bagshaw**

On the planning front, I had a motion passed calling for a planning and design brief for the site of the Royal Victoria Hospital which is to be placed on the market at the end of this year. The idea is to guide potential developers in terms of acceptable uses, the balance of housing and other uses, road and pedestrian access points, and the retention of the mature trees – all with the involvement of the local community. On the transport front, I had a roads and pavement briefing which took us on a tour of recently repaired roads and the council's new facilities out at Sighthill and also had the monthly update on the implementation of the tram project, which appears to be making good progress.

Locally, I have been dealing with bin complaints, meeting with and listening to the views of the developer and objectors in connection with the Edinburgh Academicals' controversial plans to build a substantial stadium and retail facilities in Stockbridge, and been involved with Broughton High School through the parent council and the excellent Septemberfest event which was held this month.

## **Chas Booth**

Edinburgh's bin collections have been a hot topic this month, with good reason. While Greens are naturally supportive of fortnightly landfill collections and increased recycling, we have been very critical of the way the council has handled the transition. Along with Cllr Gavin Corbett I met with the Waste Services Manager back in September to discuss some concerns that had been raised with us. We were assured that planning for the switch-over was well in hand and that no major problems were foreseen. Once the constituent complaints started flooding in, however, it became clear this was another example of the "we know best" council attitude. Greens have been pressing for robust action to resolve the problems, and to ensure lessons are learned.

On a more positive note, I met with officials from Economic Development recently to hear their update on plans to bring offshore renewable construction jobs to Leith. Discussions are already at an advanced stage with a number of wind turbine manufacturers, and if things go to plan, and if the required investment in the port infrastructure is forthcoming, we could see over 800 green-collar jobs created. I'm keeping a close eye on progress.

## **Maggie Chapman**

I am delighted to be the first convenor of the Council's Petitions Committee, something I tried to set up in the previous Council session. This could be a really important way of opening up the Council and giving the people of Edinburgh an easy way to raise issues or concerns. The committee meetings will be webcast, so that we can reach more people than just those who turn up to meetings, and I hope that we will also take the committee out on tour, into communities, and have a youth-focussed meeting at least once a year. The first meeting is on 3rd December, so do get thinking about the types of things you think we should be doing! Any Edinburgh resident (on the electoral roll) can start a petition, and after collecting 500 or more signatures, a valid petition will be heard by the Committee. Further information is available at:

<http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20232/petitions/1829/petitions/1>

As part of the recent Edinburgh World Justice Festival, I was asked to contribute to a Forces Watch event about military recruitment in schools. In 2007 I campaigned, unsuccessfully, to get the Council to ban the recruiting of children by the armed forces in schools; in the last couple of years there have been over 200 visits by the forces to our schools. I think we should resist the militarisation of our children and the normalising of violence in society at every opportunity.

And of course, the day-to-day work continues; contributing to plans to improve Leith Walk, supporting individuals facing the effects of the punitive Welfare Reform changes, and assisting community groups such as the Pilmeny Development Project who seek to improve ordinary people's lives.

## **Gavin Corbett**

It's been a busy month so far with Green ground gained at Education Committee (along with Melanie Main) on parent engagement and school buildings. The big issue was the proposed closure of Castlebrae High School which Greens opposed. Finance and Resources Committee agreed to give a lease of premises to Remade, a new community

repair project which Greens have worked on. The new Property Repairs Sub-Committee met for the first time and I fed in concerns of a group of tenement flat owners.

At ward level it has been bins, bins, bins. In refocusing the service on recycling, the Council is doing the right thing but the transition has been very rocky, generating dozens of complaints. We've made some progress with a potential community woodland buy-out on Easter Craiglockhart Hill. I met with and offered help to a new co-housing group, spent a morning at Water of Leith Centre and worked with council staff on establishing new priorities for Transport and Environment in the south west of the city. As a local ward team we met for a social evening on 11 October and delivery of 10,000 ward newsletters has started!

### **Melanie Main**

Much time over the last month has been taken up with Education Committee, working with Gavin, successfully lobbying for changes to recommendations. We supported the decision to build new classrooms on five Primary School's playgrounds to cope with rising school rolls for 2012/13 (little else could be done in such a short timescale and parents preferred this option) and fought hard for a long-term review of overall school space. Emails about the new Portobello High School and the consultation on the Castlebrae High School closure dominate my inbox.

There has been a major paper on what decisions and action are delegated to officers, from directors down: very dry but vital to have input to if we are to make inroads towards 'a listening Council' over the next five years.

In Meadows and Morningside I met with residents in Greenbank to discuss road safety and rat runs and agreed a campaign over the next few months culminating in a public meeting in January 2013. A Green team meeting on 11th October kicked-off discussions about local campaigns and focus over the next few years, and we agreed a new monthly get together on the first Tuesday of every month at Cloisters, Tollcross.