



## **Green Group of Councillors: Report for May – June 2012**

The number of Green councillors in Edinburgh doubled after May's local elections. The new Green Group are now the fourth party on Edinburgh council and the main progressive opposition to the Labour-SNP coalition. Green Councillors have pledged to bring fresh ideas to the Council and ensure the Council becomes an open and listening council. Here's a short report from the Green Councillors where each gives some highlights of the first month's activities.

### **Steve Burgess**

Green councillors hit the ground running with two proposals to the Council's main Policy & Strategy committee two weeks ago. The first, to ensure all council staff receive at least a basic Living Wage and the second on transforming Edinburgh into a truly cycle-friendly city. The new Lab-SNP Administration blocked both proposals, promising progress was being made behind the scenes on the Living Wage. Greens will be keeping up pressure for early introduction of a Living Wage and pursuing cycle funding in the next Council budget.

With a new Administration there's an opportunity to fundamentally change the way the Council goes about its business. So Greens have used the new fortnightly meetings of Party leaders to introduce some new ideas for making the Council far more open and democratic. We're hoping the other parties respond positively.

At ward level I've been continuing to support the new Craggs community sports hub. Last week, the local social housing provider and teachers organised a visit from primary school children to the Craggs to weed and plant a flower bed outside the centre. One example of how the Craggs is providing an exciting new focus for community activity.

### **Nigel Bagshaw**

As the Greens' new Planning spokesperson I've been getting to grips with Edinburgh's planning system. It will take a while to amass the knowledge needed successfully to challenge the less socially and environmentally sustainable aspects of planning but I've made a start.

The first meeting of Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee went well with two Green cycling-related proposals accepted as well as a delay to a quarry lease for lack of a proper environmental assessment. However, Greens councillors are concerned whether the same influence over council policy will be possible if the Administration goes ahead with major changes to the role of committees after the summer. Watch this space.

Back in my ward I have been working with various community councils, schools and residents' associations, establishing links with local social organisations and discovering the weird and wonderful goings-on in the ward through a steady stream of casework.

[www.edinburghgreens.org.uk](http://www.edinburghgreens.org.uk)

## **Chas Booth**

Leith Waterworld has taken most of my time and energy since being elected. I've been persuading the new council Lab-SNP coalition that reopening Waterworld is worth the effort and investment. I helped ensure that a representative from the Splashback! campaign to reopen the facility was able to present their draft business plan to councillors at a meeting on 19 June. I'm now working with fellow councillors on a conference on community ownership of sports facilities to further the case for Waterworld reopening.

The 'Seafield Stink' has blighted the lives of many in Leith for years. So supported by the Leith Links Residents' Association, I brought a proposal to the first Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee to force Scottish Water to undertake new investment to end the odour nuisance at the plant. Only the two Greens on the committee voted to serve notice on Scottish Water but I'm still hopeful we can convince the committee to deal with the matter more robustly.

A literal highlight for me was appointment to FETA, the body that manages construction of the "Forth Replacement Crossing" (in reality a second forth road bridge). As the first-ever Green member of the Authority, I will look for any opportunity to challenge this doubling of road capacity across the Forth with the resultant disastrous impact on climate emissions, road congestion and air pollution in and around Edinburgh. My literal highlight occurred when new board members were given a tour of the bridge including to the top of the south tower. My fears that those opposed to a second bridge might meet with an 'accident' aloft were thankfully unfounded!

## **Maggie Chapman**

At the recent Scottish Participatory Democracy Conference organised by the Scottish Community Development Centre, Fife Council and the Participatory Budgeting Unit, I was invited to speak about Leith Decides, and about the relationship between participatory democracy and representative democracy. Contributors to this interesting day will be drawing together a collective response for the ongoing consultation on the Community Engagement and Renewal Bill, which will hopefully give more power to communities to control what happens in their neighbourhoods.

The last couple of months has seen an increase in activity by the Scottish Defence League (with support from the BNP), targeting certain organisations and companies that supply halaal food (on the grounds that this is animal cruelty). This is simply an excuse to target Muslim customers, and I have been working with Unite Against Fascism and Unison to mobilise support against the SDL. The march on 26th May was a good day, if not attended by as many people as we would have wished.

On a ward level, there are ongoing discussions about the future of Leith Walk, given that it will be a long time before trams make their way down the Walk! Public meetings discussing a Vision for Leith Walk have raised several very interesting ideas, some of which we will hopefully be able to take forward sooner rather than later. I am working with my ward colleagues on these - more updates will hopefully be available over the coming months.

## **Gavin Corbett**

At a policy level the work is really just starting but I was pleased that, at Health, Social Care and Housing Committee we asked the Council to prepare a full report on how best to align ending fuel poverty with a commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 42%. Later the same week, at Education Committee, the Administration agreed to our request to review pupil support arrangements in primary schools, following a similar review in secondary schools.

At a ward level, the big issues have been at geographical extremes with the controversial scheme to build new homes on green land at the former Napier University site at Craighouse. Fellow Green councillor, Melanie Main and I have met both the developers and the community campaigners on this and I have held discussions with other community representatives on a potential community buy-out of Craiglockhart Woods. Meanwhile, I have continued to press for a sustainable future for the massive former brewery site at Fountainbridge, meeting officials and developers and serving on a community steering group.

On a smaller scale I have been facilitating a community-led guide to "living in colonies" in my area and arranging a meeting to develop an energy action plan for a local primary school. Among the dozens of ward queries I have dealt with it was very nice to get this reply from a parent who I helped deal with racist bullying of his child at school: "Thank you for being there for us in our hour of need. It shall not be forgotten".

## **Melanie Main**

I've been meeting with the Cockburn Association and developers about the major Craighouse development on the edge of my ward and am now better-informed to help Friends of Craighouse in their campaign. Please look out for the planning application due out in the summer and consider putting in a response to the developer's desire to build on protected green space on one of Edinburgh's historic seven hills.

Expecting Police Board to be fairly routine, I discovered there will be £1.5m reserves coming back to the Council when the board is wound up next year. So with help from fellow Green Councillors, I'll be putting my first proposal to full Council this week to have this money ring-fenced to support initiatives for restorative justice.

At the agenda setting meeting ahead of next week's Audit committee, I seemed to be the only councillor who had read the papers and noticed an Audit Scotland report appeared to be attacking Councillors for the privatisation of council services and claiming this had caused 'reputation damage' to the Council! Interference in the political process perhaps? Many feathers have been ruffled; which will make for an interesting Audit committee this week.