



Edinburgh Green Councillors' Report 2015

Introduction

Welcome to Edinburgh Green Councillors annual report 2015 - a review of the year giving some examples of our wide-ranging activities as Green Councillors - it's been a team effort working with our Green MSP colleagues, the Edinburgh Branch Committee and Edinburgh Party members. For more details of our work please see our monthly reports posted on www.edinburghgreens.org.uk

2015 saw Greens narrowly miss out to Labour in the [Leith-Walk by-election](#) which followed Maggie Chapman's departure from the Green Councillor Group to pursue her political career as top MSP candidate for the North East. However, Greens are confident of winning back Leith-Walk ward at the next council election in May 2017. Edinburgh's current Green Councillors (below) are Nigel Bagshaw (Inverleith), Chas Booth (Leith), Melanie Main (Meadows/Morningside), Steve Burgess (Southside/Newington) and Gavin Corbett (Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart);



Once again the Green Councillors annual report comes at the time of Council Budget setting. This year Edinburgh Council is having to make swinging cuts of £85 million in 2016-17 but Green councillors are refusing to implement in full this austerity budget as required by the UK and Scottish Governments. Instead led by Finance spokesperson Gavin Corbett, Green Councillors are proposing a [Green Budget](#), doing what they can with limited powers to stave-off the most damaging cuts through a 4.3% council tax rise, equivalent to an extra 97p a week for the average Band D property. This would raise £10 million to invest in vital services and to combat cuts in schools, social care and vulnerable children by; blocking cuts to special schools and disadvantaged children; keeping budgets intact for social care of frail older people; supporting community centres, libraries and leisure centres to stay open and retaining a properly-funded school music service. On top of that, the additional money also allows the Council to recruit and keep more care workers to bridge a gap of 5,000 unmet care hours a week. The Green Budget also sees a substantial investment in long term repair and maintenance of schools.

The background to this is the Council continuing to progress a major change to the way services are provided in the City through a transformation programme that sees about 2000 posts lost. Whilst

Green Cllr Gavin Corbett has challenged the ruling coalition to stick to their election pledge of [no compulsory redundancies](#), it looks increasing like this won't hold given the extent of the job losses concerned.

2015 started with Gavin Corbett relating the bizarre scandal of the Council giving away a valuable common good asset - [Parliament House](#), now read on...

Standing up for communities and neighbourhoods



There are dozens of projects that Green councillors are involved in our wards that improve communities and neighbourhoods – from parks and green spaces to local shops, from road safety to local schools and from local planning decisions to community events but in addition much of our work is trying to get the best outcome for residents is at City-wide level through policy making...

In May 2015, Green Planning spokesperson Nigel Bagshaw rejected the proposed Local Development Plan for Edinburgh, the key document that guides development in the City but which supported building unsustainable suburban estates on greenfield sites. Instead he proposed a [Greener alternative](#). Later in the year Nigel again argued that the key document to oversee growth of the Edinburgh City Region to 2037 needed to be sent back to the drawing board. Greens stated the [Strategic Development Plan Main Issues Report](#)

(SESPlan MIR) was based on a level of growth in the region far beyond anything in the recent past, with 135,000 new homes proposed, and also failed to focus on specific shortfalls in affordable housing and on the business needs of a low carbon economy.

In May, Green Education spokesperson Melanie Main proposed that the City Council's Education Committee should increase the number of [parent representatives](#) from one to two but was rebuffed by Labour's Education Convenor. The following month Mel was in the Evening News outlining how the [yawning attainment gulf](#) between those children and young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers can be tackled.

Also in May, Green Housing spokesperson Steve Burgess won backing from the whole Council for Shelter Scotland's [Make Renting Right](#) campaign. In an Evening News column, Steve argued for a [shake-up of housing policy](#) as house prices and rents soar in the Capital.

Green Environment spokesperson Chas Booth brought a successful proposal to the City Council's Environment committee in October to ensure that the Council tries to identify effective and less costly alternatives to the [weed-killer glyphosate](#) a suspected carcinogen. Chas wasn't so successful earlier in the year when he tried to get more movement on [dog fouling](#).

In November Gavin Corbett made a bid to reject controversial [cuts to lunchtime school lollipop crossings](#) but knocked back by the council's Finance committee. Thankfully two months later the ruling Labour/SNP Coalition saw Green sense and changed their minds.

Expanding Public Participation

One of the Green Councillors' ongoing themes has been supporting the way the Council is opened up, to ensure that decisions are made more transparently and inclusively.

In the autumn Green Councillor Chas Booth took over the Convenorship of the Petitions Committee and immediately tackled the scandal of tenants in Lorne Street who faced eviction as it looked like their homes were to be sold from under them. Green Councillors gave their support to the residents and [Gavin Corbett blogged](#) on the full story.



Melanie Main took up Convenorship of the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership and immediately set about extending Participatory Budgeting for the area with a successful proposal to commit more grant money and roads budget to community decision making to be brought to a PB event later this year.

Thinking Global, Acting Local on Climate Change



Edinburgh has aligned itself to fairly ambitious targets to reduce energy use and carbon emissions by 2020 – Green Cllrs want to ensure that policy and practice matches this commitment, while at the same time showing how energy improvements could reduce bills and create jobs. So again this year we continued to press the Council to meet its duty under the Climate Change Act to reduce carbon pollution that is causing Climate Change.

With Climate talks kicking off in Paris Edinburgh Green Councillors joined thousands of campaigners from all over Scotland in marching through the city. At the time of the Paris talks, Green Group Convenor Steve Burgess used Council Question time to tackle Leader Andrew Burns about the need

for the Council to more actively contribute to reducing climate-changing pollution and ask what he would personally do to achieve this.

In committee, Steve Burgess also challenged the ruling Coalition over a report that the Council's own climate-changing pollution had risen by 8% in the last year, successfully calling for an urgent report on initiatives to bring pollution down which should come before the Council early this year.

In September Chas Booth saw his efforts supporting [Edinburgh Community Solar](#) come to fruition when the company was launched. Some Green Cllrs have now bought shares in a commercial company for the first time! Earlier in the year, Chas won Council backing to look at how the Lothians pensions scheme might be able to [divest from exploitation of fossil-fuels](#).

Green Employment



Earlier in 2015, Chas Booth led a successful call for the Council to officially register its concern about the potential impact of the secretive international [“Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership”](#) (TTIP) on jobs and public services being negotiated between the EU and the USA. Concerns included the fact that TTIP could prevent local councils from making procurement choices from local goods providers.

Responding to the proposals for an [Edinburgh Region City Deal](#) in August, Gavin Corbett welcomed progress but said that a greener future needed to be part of City Deal ‘DNA’. Green Councillors were later successful in getting ‘sustainable development’ included as one of the criteria for Edinburgh’s City Deal bid to the UK Government.

Also in the autumn, Green Finance spokesperson Gavin Corbett lamented the [revival of proposals to privatise management of council facilities](#) that would have seen the running of offices, depots, schools, libraries, community centres would be handed to the private sector and building-related staff – janitors, cleaners, receptionists, caretakers etc – would be transferred to private providers.

A balanced transport system

Green Councillors Nigel Bagshaw and Chas Booth have been instrumental in the roll-out of 20mph speed limits across most of the Capital which, following a public consultation, is set to take place [from July this year](#).

Sadly, in June, despite opposition from Green Cllr Nigel Bagshaw, the Transport committee decided to open up [bus](#)



[lanes](#) to other vehicles, except during peak hours. Prominent routes affected include Leith Street, Leith Walk, Lanark Road and York Place. Even the Council’s own report accepted that “there will be some loss of amenity for cyclists”.

The City Council needs a lot more urgency on [air pollution](#) argued Chas Booth after figures released following a recent BBC Scotland investigation showed a woeful complacency on the part of Edinburgh Council to tackle this serious problem that costs lives every year.

And outside Edinburgh...

In April, Chas Booth represented Edinburgh’s councillors at [“Bairns not Bombs” blockade](#) at Faslane Naval Base along with Green co-convenor and MSP, Patrick Harvie, saying;

“Weapons of mass destruction are obscene at any time, but wasting billions of pounds on Trident while cutting services for the most vulnerable is doubly obscene.”

