

For a Fairer, Greener Edinburgh

Green councillors 2012–2017: End of Term report

February 2017

Green councillors were first elected in Edinburgh in 2007.

In 2012, six Green councillors were elected: Steve Burgess, Maggie Chapman, Nigel Bagshaw, Melanie Main, Chas Booth and Gavin Corbett. Maggie subsequently stood down in September 2015 following a move to take up employment outside of Edinburgh.

This is a brief summary of those councillors' priorities and achievements during this most recent council term. Further details can be found on www.edinburghgreens.org.uk

Opening up the council

During this term the city council has begun **webcasting** its meetings, following a motion by former Green councillor Alison Johnstone (now Green MSP) in the previous council term.

Green councillor Chas Booth chairs the **petitions committee** which allows citizens to take concerns directly to councillors. One of the highest profile petitions heard this term was from tenants in **Lorne Street** in Leith, battling successfully against eviction by their private landlords.

Green councillor Maggie Chapman first pioneered **Leith Decides** in which people locally get to vote on how council community grants are spent. This was taken up by Chas Booth and in other parts of the city, by other Green councillors: by Gavin Corbett in South West ("**Grant a Grand**") and Melanie Main and Steve Burgess in South-Central area where the pot for **South Central Decides** was the largest ever at over £200k.

Over this period, **16&17 year olds** have been given new voting rights in Scotland and Greens have led proposals to ensure that young people feel able to use their vote.

Supporting local business

Melanie Main was instrumental in getting community-owned greengrocer, **Dig-In** off the ground in Bruntsfield. Gavin Corbett sat on the board of repair and re-use social enterprise **Remade** and secured council backing for its successful campaign which saw director Sophie Unwin awarded UK social entrepreneur of the year. Chas Booth pushed the council to secure jobs in wind turbine manufacture at **Leith docks**. Greens also successfully backed local traders in keeping places in the **Tron Kirk** and, more generally, secured a commitment that local businesses would be included in tenders for contracts.

Protecting green space

Green planning spokesperson Nigel Bagshaw consistently put an alternative development vision for Edinburgh as the council passed its controversial **Local Development Plan** with loss of green belt land.

Steve Burgess and Melanie Main ran a successful campaign to secure three public Rights of Way through the **Astley Ainslie** hospital site.

Chas Booth won backing for his plan to plant a **tree in the city for every child**.

Safe and clean streets

Chas Booth worked with council staff and trade unions to develop a **10 point plan to improve bin collections**. Greens consistently put more environmental wardens as a priority in their annual budgets.

Gavin Corbett led on the campaign to stop **school crossing patrols** being slashed. Meanwhile, all Green councillors gave strong backing to the extension of **20mph streets** which were first proposed by Steve Burgess in 2009.

Steve Burgess won support to introduce a dedicated service to deal with **empty homes** which blight many neighbourhoods. He also led on calls to make it easier for communities to organise “**Playing Out**” sessions, where traffic is restricted to allow children to play on streets.

Chas Booth has pushed hard for effective action on air pollution including making better use of testing powers and seeking to ensure that Edinburgh pioneered Scotland’s first **low emission zone (LEZ)**.

Chas has also consistently worked with health bodies and police to argue for more responsible use of **licensing rules** in areas where there is already over-supply of alcohol.

Finally, safety and security apply within common stairways as well as on streets. Alone of all the parties in the council, Greens continued to make the case for a proper **lighting service in tenements**. They also led calls for a review of how **holiday lets** are regulated in residential areas.

Backing communities above developers

In Leith Chas Booth led for the Greens as the only party in Edinburgh which backed the **Splashback** campaign to keep Leith Waterworld open as a public leisure pool.

Gavin Corbett worked with residents in **Allan Park** off Slateford to successfully head off plans to demolish a house for a new road into the green space at Meggetland.

Nigel Bagshaw, on planning committee, regularly challenged developers where greed was being placed above need: so for the **Accies site** in Stockbridge, **Caltongate** in the Old Town, the “garden” district on the fringe of the city and fought against inappropriate development of the old **Royal High School**, Craighouse campus and **Canonmills** bridge and been the sole councillor to object to losses of Edinburgh’s built heritage around **St Andrews Square**.

Melanie Main and Gavin Corbett were vocal opponents of the significant overdevelopment of **Craighouse** between Morningside and Craiglockhart.

Gavin Corbett spoke on behalf of a community-based bid to take over the **Boroughmuir High School** building when it is vacated in summer 2017. He also pushed for a community-based bid to take over the much-loved **Engine Shed** in the south side.

Against some setbacks, the Greens secured a commitment to look at “**meantime**” **use of vacant sites**, as pioneered at Fountainbridge, where a masterplan involving in-depth dialogue with local people won a masterplan of the year accolade.

Sustainable transport

Nigel Bagshaw played an active part in the trams working group which eventually saw trams up and running after years of delay. He also pushed for **new cycleways, cycle storage** and, with all Greens backed the rising **budget for cycling**, until it met 10% of transport budget.

Nigel also made sure that pedestrians were highlighted, securing agreement for pedestrian crossings at **temporary roadworks** and calling for greater action on **illegal parking** and dropped kerbs.

Safe and fresh food

When the **horsemeat scandal** erupted in 2013 Chas Booth and Melanie Main were to the fore, arguing for more stringent checks on the quality of food.

Melanie Main also campaigned for further use of **Food for Life** standards in school meals.

In Gorgie, Green councillors, MSPs and candidates were prominent in a successful campaign to head off closure of **Gorgie City Farm**.

Tackling inequality

Green housing spokesperson Steve Burgess led a successful campaign for the council to commit to a no-evictions policy for the odious **bedroom tax**. He also made sure that the Greens were the only party to support Edinburgh Tenants Federation's call for a **rent freeze** for council tenants in 2017. Finally, Steve pushed for the council to look for alternatives to **bed and breakfast hostels** for homeless people and for higher standards in temporary accommodation.

In budget debates, Greens secured agreements on **welfare rights services and disabled adaptations**. They also got council backing for motions against **corporate tax-dodging** and in favour of a "**Robin Hood**" tax on international money exchange.

At Finance Committee Gavin Corbett successfully overturned a recommendation which would have seen local deaf-led charity Deaf Action lose out on council funding to provide **services to deaf people**.

Making social care matter

Steve Burgess hit the headlines arguing for a "**Living Wage Plus**" for social care workers, to address the crisis of recruitment and retention which means that many vulnerable people are left without care or stuck in hospital.

A Green City Region Deal

On Economy Committee Gavin Corbett has constantly made the case for the jobs bonanza which could be created by the city playing a lead role in developing a low carbon economy. The advent of the City Region Deal has made that prospect more achievable and led to the Greens publishing proposals for a **Green City Region Deal**, following a round table event with leading academics and pressure groups.

The proposal includes introducing a **Transient Visitor Levy** or tourist tax on which Greens have led calls since 2011.

Standing up for schools

Green councillors stood shoulder to shoulder with parents and community representatives in **Craigmillar** as they successfully resisted attempts to close their local high school.

When the tragic events at **Liberton High School** led to the death of 12 year old Keane Wallis-Bennett Green councillors were first to make a case for additional funding for more school repairs. Later, when other problems emerged at **17 privately-financed schools**, Melanie Main was to the fore, arguing for an inquiry to make sure there was no repeat.

On Education Committee, Melanie Main and Gavin Corbett consistently for a **greater parent voice**, making the case for the number of parent representatives on the committee to be doubled to two.

Melanie also ensured that school rules on commercial companies **advertising to children** and young people were tightened.

Fighting budget cuts

In successive annual budgets Greens won praise from unions, voluntary organisations and community campaigns for consistently showing an **alternative to service cuts**.

For example, in 2015, the Greens published an alternative budget which argued that most cuts could be headed off if the council had the kinds of powers which other European cities take for granted.

Meanwhile, in 2016, the Green budget challenged the Scottish Government to lift the council tax freeze a year before it actually did so, to allow investment in services.

Cleaner, greener

In the challenge to make sure the council meets its climate change targets, Greens were prominent, with Chas Booth taking a place on both the **Community Solar Co-operative** and the new **Energy for Edinburgh** company (first proposed by Steve Burgess in 2010). Chas also pushed the council to rule out allowing fracking, while Melanie Main consistently campaigned for more **efficient school use of energy**. Greens also pushed repeatedly for council pensions to get out of **fossil fuel investment**.

Chas secured backing for a review of the council's use of **weedkiller glyphosate**.

Local champions

And, last but not least, Greens have acted as champions for the areas they represent.

In **Fountainbridge-Craiglockhart** Gavin Corbett revels in being a hands-on councillor, leading or taking part in clean-ups in Hutchison, Water of Leith, Craiglockhart woods and Shandon railway path. He has been active in improvements to Harrison and Saughton Parks, Paties Road and Fountainbridge Green. He campaigned successfully with residents for traffic calming in Craiglockhart and to reduce dangerous parking in Shandon. He has enjoyed working productively with Fountainbridge Canalside Initiative and the Grove Community Garden. He pioneered the first code of conduct for the Union Canal towpath. And, lastly, he is very proud that 3 of the last 5 winners of the annual award for citizenship have been his nominees.

In **Meadows and Morningside** Melanie Main has led on the setting up of a community greengrocer on Bruntsfield Place called "Dig In". She has pushed successfully for safer streets and the curbing of "rat-runs". Protecting key green spaces like the Meadows from over-use by commercial companies has also been a high priority for Mel.

In **Leith** Chas Booth has doubled the budget for Leith Decides, which gives local people a say in how council budgets are spent. He successfully pushed the council to resurface the playground at Victoria Primary, and has spoken up for increased road safety around schools across the ward. He has battled to preserve and enhance community assets such as Leith Waterworld, Custom House and Duncan Place Resource Centre, and has worked hard to support local community groups such as the Leith Theatre Trust, Leithers Don't Litter & Leith Community Croft. And he has promoted the expansion of the cycle route network across Leith Links, and continues to push for expansion to the Shore, Easter Road and beyond.

In **Southside/Newington**, Steve Burgess has actively supported 3 community councils, 6 residents associations, 2 community centre committees, 4 school parent forums, Prestonfield Neighbourhood Project, Canongate Youth and the Causey Project. Steve won backing at full council for Braidwood Bike Group's 'Skelf' off-road track, Edinburgh Playing Out's street closures and The Bike Station - following a recent fire. Steve secured major road/footway improvements and tree conservation at Gladstone Terrace and West Savile Terrace. Last year, his proposal for a second community garden at Prestonfield was voted through at South Central Decides participatory budgeting event and a campaign with Melanie Main won three Rights of Way through the Astley Ainslie NHS site.

In **Inverleith** Nigel Bagshaw has supported local communities in campaigns to protect local shops and the environment in the face of developments at Edinburgh Academicals and Canonmills bridge, gained better physical access to care homes in Stockbridge and Warriston, supported path and lighting improvements in Drylaw/Telford, fought for safer crossings, pedestrian links, cycling facilities and wider use of the 20 mph zones across the ward, and worked to protect community assets such as Drylaw Neighbourhood Centre.

And after May 2017?

If you want more Green councillors to do more to give Edinburgh the green future our great city needs then Vote Green [1] on 4 May.