Planning for a Greener City

Edinburgh City Centre Greens Event – 22 February 2020

Event summary and feedback

Background

The City of Edinburgh Council are consulting on their ideas for the next Local Development Plan for Edinburgh – 'City Plan 2030'. This public event aimed to provide a forum for people to discuss the Main Issues Report and the opportunities it presents from a green perspective.

40 people registered to attend the event beforehand and 39 participated on the day. Of these 17 were Scottish Green Party (SGP) members. The format for the day was an introduction followed by facilitated discussion groups, each focusing on one of the four sections of the Choices for City Plan 2030 document. Participants had an opportunity to take part in two groups, with some time at the end to discuss issues informally and look at what the other two groups had discussed.

This report is a record of what was discussed in the group. It is best read in conjunction with the documentation at the Council's Consultation Hub (available from the internet link given below). The record will be used by SGP Councillors to inform their work and input to the City Plan 2030, and it will also be provided to the Council Officers as a submission to the consultation.

The public consultation runs to **31st March 2020** and individual responses can be made online at the Council's Consultation Hub:

https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/choicesforcityplan2030/

Introduction

Councillor Claire Miller provided an introduction to the day, emphasising the importance of taking part in this early consultation on the plan, the opportunities to submit comments and the links to other plans and strategies the council is developing.

An outline of the process was provided. This is the first and main stage for public involvement in the preparation of the next local development plan. It was emphasised that this consultation is about significant issues and changes since the approval of the existing plan, rather than offering a blank canvas for any new ideas.

A sustainable city which supports everyone's physical and mental wellbeing

1 Making Edinburgh a sustainable, active and connected city

1A 'We want to create a new policy which will help connect our places, parks and greenspaces together as part of a multi-functional, local, city-wide, regional, and national green network.'
The group supported this but felt the meaning of 'green network' was unclear.

- Some concern over what was meant by multi-use
- Should prioritise non- motorised access
- Should have a rule that there should be no street from which a tree can't be seen
- There is no mention of wildlife value – just being a green space doesn't mean good for wildlife

1B 'We want all development (including change of use) to include green and blue infrastructure.Where appropriate this should include trees, living roofs, and nature-based drainage solutions including, ponds, swales, rain gardens and ecosystem services as well as making best use of natural features in the surrounding environment.'
This was supported, although the word 'appropriate' was seen as a possible loophole.

- Should be relevant to the scale of development and include single gardens
- Parking areas should all use permeable slabs
- Roof gardens should be used on all compatible roofs
- Should install greenery in concrete places e.g. outside Waverley and supermarkets
- Need ways to discourage loss of private greenspace
- Encourage householders to remove concrete/pebble/astro-turf from gardens and replace with genuine greenery
- Learn from other places e.g. the Lisbon plan
- Put in place metrics to monitor and measure sustainability impacts of development and events

1C 'We want City Plan 2030 to identify areas that can be used for future water management within a green / blue corridor to enable adaptation to climate change.'
This was supported but the group felt should apply to all green/blue corridors.

1D 'We want City Plan 2030 to clearly set out under what circumstances the development of poor quality or underused open space will be considered acceptable.'
This was supported if 'development' means as a community space or wildlife space, but not for profit.

- Public spaces should be protected now and in the future
- Don't destroy local use for tourist use

1E 'We want to introduce a new 'extra-large green space standard' which recognises the need for new communities to have access to green spaces more than 5 hectares, as well as smaller greenspaces.A 5-hectare green space is the equivalent of The Meadows or Saughton Park. At present our policies require new development areas to provide a park of 2 hectares.We want to increase this requirement.'
This was strongly supported but the group felt quality of greenspace is also very important.

1F 'We want City Plan 2030 to identify specific sites for new allotments and food growing, both as part of new development sites and within open space in the urban area.'
Strong support overall but:

- Should say community food growing i.e. be collective not in private plots
- More allotments wanted
- Increase projects for public/community use i.e. community gardens
- Some concern about loss of public parks to private plots

1G 'We want City Plan 2030 to identify space for additional cemetery provision, including the potential for green and woodland burials.'
Additional cemetery provision was not supported as it was not seen as a priority for limited land in the city. Existing ones are valued though.

1H 'We want to revise our existing policies and greenspace designations to ensure that as part of planning consents new green spaces have long term maintenance and management arrangements in place.The Council favours factoring on behalf of the private landowner(s) but will consider adoption should sufficientb maintenance resources be made available.'
The group were undecided on this idea but felt that the quality of the spaces is important and could be affected by the factoring choice.

Ideas not covered by council proposals related to the use and management of existing greenspace:

- Keep parks as parks – not entertainment venues
- Enforce planning regulations and conditions and guidelines
- CO_2 impacts of park events should be considered
- More say was wanted on commercial events taking place in parks
- Ensure full transparency in decision making about use of parks and green spaces

Ideas not covered by council proposals related to the use and management of infrastructure provision in greenspaces:

- Should be a requirement to have covered bike parking and bike access
- Public toilets that stay open in the evening
- Benches with solar energy e.g. for charging points
- Simple signs reminding people to be civil (in how they use space)

2 Improving the quality, density and accessibility of development
Not discussed in the workshop.

3 Delivering carbon neutral buildings
The proposal to adopt platinum standards building regulations was strongly supported. The name *passivhaus* could be applied.

- The following ideas were suggested on what should be considered/promoted:
  - Carbon neutral materials for building
  - Should be carbon neutral in running heating and lighting
  - Build with timber (Scandinavian style) not brick, concrete etc

- There should be a commitment to include carbon negative homes in developments
  - Need to relax restrictions on double glazing and solar panels in conservation areas and provide incentives
  - Should promote collective options in new tenements e.g. for heating
  - No car parking at houses and there should be local public transport
  - We need to transition from new housing being suburban in style to higher density and less car focused
- The idea is good but education and awareness raising activities needed.
  - This is a difficult question – challenge of imbalance between citizens and experts on complex system, which affects the democratic process
  - Would need to provide information to citizens about the benefits of carbon neutral buildings for them, for the environment etc
  - Should be stated that there would be lower running costs for residents
- Some concerns that:
  - This policy won't help with the issue of retrofitting existing buildings
  - There must be a lot consented and not built – should be retrospectively applied
  - Need to ensure there are no externalities affecting other places e.g. through offsetting elsewhere (which shouldn't be allowed to achieve carbon neutral status)

4 Creating Place Briefs and supporting the use of Local Place Plans in our communities

4A 'We want to work with local communities to prepare Place Briefs for areas and sites within City Plan 2030 highlighting the key elements of design, layout, open space, biodiversity net gain and community infrastructure development should deliver.'
This was supported but the group felt the statement given is a starting point only.

- New developments should have mandatory, pro-community improvements – schools, paths, public services.
- Briefings needed on Place Briefs as a council planning document

4B 'We want to support Local Place Plans being prepared by our communities. City Plan 2030 will set out how Place Plans can help us achieve great places and support community ambitions.'
This was supported but the group felt this statement is a starting point only and we discussed how this should be done:

- The Council must provide adequate support and encouragement
  - There need to be funds allocated to support local place plan community committees
  - The council should support with data
  - Communities need technical support with facilitation and design
  - Provision of access to professional skills
- There must be clear parameters and guidelines
  - With negotiation of how powers and resources are shared
  - Guidelines required on how to do it
- A local place plan should leave no one behind
  - Plans should have to evidence minimum level of engagement
  - Should be an opportunity to restore democratic deficit
  - Make sure the 'planners' involved are from diverse backgrounds
  - Be open to submission of ideas from general public in the area

- A local place plan should help deliver strategic aims
  - The plans need to be integrated with biodiversity and climate action plans
  - Need minimum standards and targets (e.g. for climate emissions)
  - Will require education about these overarching aims e.g. sustainability
  - What happens if the plan conflicts with LDP values?
- People need to know the plan will result in action and change
  - Should be more action focused than existing examples
  - Link to participatory budgeting – given a share of local government money to vote on its use in relation to delivering the plan
  - Community should be able to deliver aspects, not be in the back seat of development
  - Local place plans should be legally binding/taken into account in planning decisions
  - Co-decisioning - a community rep could be part of the planning decision

A city where you don't need to own a car to move around

5 Delivering community infrastructure
Not discussed.

6 Creating places that focus on people not cars
In the discussions on choices 6 and 7 there was clear support for more space for non-car uses and a move towards more active and sustainable travel spaces for people.

- People supported a switch to priority given to pedestrians from cars, there should be areas where 'motors give way to muscles and wheels give way to feet'
- Support for more segregated cycles lanes
- Support for more pedestrian only streets and only public buses or cyclists, more shared spaces
- There should be bus lane continuity
- Autonomous vehicle trials – do we need infra/space?
- Designing spaces to be small/ narrow would help to exclude 'sports utility vehicle' type cars
- There should be more green squares with trees and plants and benches/seats/shelters
- Greater permeability
- It was thought that as well as proposals there was a need to enforce parking regulations and parking control and introduce parking fees across the city
- There needs to be considerations to people with disabilities and perhaps to phase-in changes
- There is a need to provide amenities such as shops, parks, entertainment, GPs, libraries etc so that the need to travel is reduced
- Old fashioned, out of town car parks could be re-developed
- Support for provision of water fountains
- Support for public toilets, especially those that stay open in evenings. More subsidy for private toilets was suggested

- In terms of option A, people asked what would happen if developers failed to meet targets on public transport usage and walking and cycling
- In terms of option B- use of place briefs to set targets, there was also a question over how this would be monitored and delivered

7 Supporting the reduction in car use in Edinburgh

- Why are we anticipating more airport demand? – we need to anticipate more train use
- It was recognised that there was a need for some vehicles (cars, buses), especially for some elderly and disabled people – not everyone can use a bike
- Buses can sometimes hold up buses/issue of too many buses on certain routes
- It would help to have storage spaces for mobility scooters, bikes and cargo bikes
- Need charging points for e-bikes and scooters
- Support for 'no car days' in city
- In some areas student cars and resident parking could be banned (like Oxford)
- Other cities limit deliveries to between 10am-6pm
- More areas should be pedestrianised – for walking and cycle only (but walking paths should be separated from cycle paths) –there should be no parking on bike lanes
- More use and encouragement for shuttle buses
- Suggestion of banning single occupancy cars in city centre – provide car share points/ more space for car share instead of ownership
- Hotels and Air BnB/holiday lets generate traffic – there should be no more in city centre
- Suggestions for hot desk office space
- There should be better city outskirts transport services
- There should be access to public transport – dial a bus local and accessible schemes
- Re-use of suburban rail/light rail
- Support for free public transport
- More bus stops and voices calling out stops
- There was support for park and ride services and suggestions that this could include park and ride for tour buses
- Support got ferries/water buses

8 Delivering new walking and cycle routes
Not discussed.

A city in which everyone lives in a home which they can afford

9 Protecting against the loss of Edinburgh's homes to other uses

9A *'We want to consult on designating Edinburgh, or parts of Edinburgh, as a 'Short Term Let Control Area' where planning permission will always be required for the change of use of whole properties for short-term lets.'*

- "whole properties" maybe should be reworded to just "properties" – there could be loopholes to this but maybe HMO would protect from this
- How is assessment of change of use made?
- Is an assessment retrospective?
- Regulation should be same across whole of Edinburgh
- How is a short term let defined? Is this part of ScotGov remit and will Councils be able to introduce own standards?
- Potential disruption same for main door as shared entrance

9B *'We want to create a new policy on the loss of homes to alternative uses. This new policy will be used when planning permission is required for a change of use of residential flats and houses to short-stay commercial visitor accommodation or other uses.'*
Strongly support new policy.

- Short term lets vs short term commercial visitor accommodation?

9C *'We could continue to use our current policies which prevent development which would have a detrimental effect on the living conditions of nearby residents.'*
Don't support current policy – it's not working.

10 Creating sustainable communities

10A *'We want to revise our policy on purpose-built student housing. We want to ensure that student housing is delivered at the right scale and in the right locations, helps create sustainable communities and looks after student's wellbeing.'*

- What is the justification for 10% max – student flats?
- More info needed on specific problem with student flats/population. Why 10% studios?
- Strongly agree that it should be managed by university or college for which it is built
- Student accommodation needs to reflect needs of different student types e.g. international vs local and postgrad vs undergrad.
- Student accommodation should incorporate a mix of ground floor uses to ensure vitality of uses
- Student accommodation should not create gated communities
- Student housing should be adaptable for residential use
- Student housing should be affordable and fit for purpose – able to be repurposed

10B 'We want to create a new policy framework which sets out a requirement for housing on all sites over a certain size coming forward for development. On sites over 0.25 hectares coming forward for student housing, hotels and short-stay commercial visitor accommodation, and other commercial business, retail and leisure developments, at least 50% of the site should be provided for housing. The new policy would not apply to land specifically allocated or designated within the plan for a specific use – i.e. business and industry land, safeguarded waste management sites, minerals sites, single school sites, our town and local centres, or sites covered by our office policy.'
Threshold should be less than 0.25 hectare.

10C 'We want to create a new policy promoting the better use of single-use out of centre retail units and commercial centres, where their redevelopment for mixed use including housing would be supported.'
Support aim – more clarification needed on particulars.

10D 'We could continue to use our existing policy on student accommodation which sets out criteria on which purpose-built student housing will be allowed based on its location and concentration only. Other guidance is currently set out in our non-statutory guidance on student housing.' and *10E 'We could continue to use our current policies which support housing as part of mixed-use development on appropriate sites to meet housing need and create strong, sustainable communities and seek to ensure a co-ordinated approach to development.'*
The status quo is not an option, we do not support these.

11 Delivering more affordable homes

11A 'We want to amend our policy to increase the provision of affordable housing requirement from 25% to 35%.All development, including conversions, which consist of 12 residential units or more must include provision for affordable housing amounting to 35% of the total units.'
- There is no such thing as affordable housing
- Is affordable the right name of the goal?
- Affordable housing meets what needs exactly?
- Chronic shortage of single bedroom housing
- Affordable housing definition isn't clear
- Need to define affordable e.g. in relation to the Living Wage
- Idea that housing costs should be max 20% of income
- Close loophole whereby developers can sell off parts of site and avoid requirement to build affordable homes
- Variable targets in different parts of city e.g. 75% in inner city
- Developers pass on land at affordable rates
- Implementation of the affordable element in any scheme should be monitored

11B 'We want City Plan 2030 to require a mix of housing types and tenures – we want the plan to be prescriptive on the required mix, including the percentage requirement for family housing and support for the Private Rented Sector.'
- How do you define 'tenure blind' for e.g. specifications
- We need more tenure models to deliver affordable housing especially co-housing

11C 'We could continue to use our current policy on affordable housing (Hou 6) which requires all housing sites to deliver 25% affordable housing and our non-statutory guidance and practise note.'
Strongly agree current policy is not acceptable.

12 Building our new homes and infrastructure

- Council needs to do more to find out who owns individual houses for enforcement purposes
- Need for housing is linked to economic development; this needs to be spread throughout the city, not just in the centre
- Promote tenement and terraced development to increase/maintain density
- Why more market rather than social housing?
- Support more intervention from the council
- Greenbelt development should not be permitted without transport links, schools, doctors etc
- Mid-market is not "affordable" – needs to be genuinely affordable
- Allow higher building – needs to be good quality and have maintenance
- Are options a genuine choice?
- Retrospective?

A city where everyone shares in its economic success

13 Supporting inclusive growth, innovation, universities, & culture

Overall there was a feeling that cultural events such as the festival was too centred on in the city centre, too dominated by a few large businesses and there was a need to support communities to have events across the city.

- Some felt that the question was too big, too broad and too ambiguous and were unsure of meaning of culture
- There was some concern that there was too much focus on high end jobs
- Issue of training – will there be people to do these jobs? Need training for low paid, essential jobs – change in immigration rules
- The issue was raised that trying to attract more international business means more flights – not very green/sustainable
- People felt that many people can't afford things in the festival
- There was a strong feeling that there was a need for cultural spaces outside the city centre and a need to spread venues outside the city centres for EIFF/Fringe (but there should also have then in city centre)
- There was concern that festivals venues in George Square, Bristo Square etc are just outdoor pubs, with many people not going to the shows. This was felt to result in a loss of business for existing pubs
- Needs to spread pop up pubs around, could have them further out of town
- There was a strong feeling that it would be good for the Council to encourage local groups to have events (like the Mela) and support communities to set these up, encourage them. Although some felt that it was also important that the council doesn't dominate plans – shouldn't be a dominant stakeholder
- One person felt that there shouldn't be public money for Social Enterprises – they should be able to "wash their face" and public money spent on other things. They can pay large amounts to employees/CEO
- People felt that there was a need to review policy on Christmas market

- There was support for more local markets/farmers markets, instead of big 'German' style markets full of 'tat'. Too much big business/large companies running markets

14 Delivering West Edinburgh

Some of the issues were discussed under other topic area.

- It was thought that with the wider area of search there was a danger that greenfield land would be opened up. It was thought that developers shouldn't be allowed to use greenfield sites until it had been shown that brownfield sites were all used.

15 Protecting our city centre, town and local centres

- There was a general view that congestion was a problem, too much traffic in city centre and Princes Street/too many buses
- The pavement on Princes Street is wider than it was, but still cluttered and not a pleasant place to be
- The road on Princes Street is too narrow
- There has to be footfall to make shopping areas viable
- There was an awareness that there could be a conflict between "business v's tourists" – who gets the space?
- Some thought that there could be a decentralisation of business from the centre but It was though that there should also be offices in the city centres
- There was quite a strong feeling that there was a potential for too many hotels and no clear way of knowing when was too many. Who will decide when too many?
- Some thought a maximum number should be set and there needed more thought to be given to the capacity of the city
- Need to create attractive retail places. Shops on Princes Street have closed but Harvey Nicol's doing well. (This development had been successful, is prestigious area)
- There was support for hotels on tram routes, out of town hotels work well especially for business users

16 Delivering office, business and industry floorspace

- It was thought to be important to provide for industrial uses as once industries are lost then difficult to get back
- There is also a need to retain and protect areas for existing industry, such as brewery
- Housing is proposed in east but all the offices and business concentrated in west. This means people have to travel across the city. Doesn't make sense! People felt that the strategy is all about the west- there needs to be more jobs on east of city
- People questioned whether so many offices were needed. What will happen in the future? It was felt that needs could change
- There should be more spaces where people can "plug in", shared spaces people can use instead of so many offices
- Some thought that offices should be "pepper potted" around rather than focussed
- It's fine to have industry out of town/centres
- Need to keep away from other uses they might conflict with, such as housing
- There was support for goods distribution hubs so less HGVs in centre