

**Minutes of meeting held in the Gray Room, Nelson Hall,
on Wednesday 2 September 2015 at 7pm**

PRESENT: Colin Christison (Chair), Moira Gibson (Minutes Secretary), Lisa Sibbald (Treasurer), Jo Scott, Tom King, Jan Fraser, Tom Bonallo, Maggie Bagan, Ethel Murray, Hilary McDowell, Tim Pogson, Fran Gifford, Dora Lola-Luz, David Wood, Samantha Campbell, May Linton.

Also present: Cllr Cameron Rose, PC Neil Mackay. Cllr Ian Perry and Ben Wilson, Principal Planner for the City of Edinburgh Council, were present for the first part of the meeting (see Guest Speaker).

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Colin Christison welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Stephen and Joan Carter, Isobel Leckie, Nancy Lynner, Derek Suttie, Colin Symes, Linda Femister and Ola Uduku.

Guest Speaker: Ben Wilson, Principal Planner, Local Planning Policy, City of Edinburgh Council

The Chair introduced Ben Wilson, a Principal Planner at the Council, who was accompanied by Cllr Ian Perry, Councillor for Southside/Newington and Convener of the Council's Planning Committee.

Ben spoke at the meeting in April, convened jointly by the Southside Association and the University of Edinburgh, to consult on the Council's proposed Guidance on Student Housing and was present in order to give an update on progress. Ben outlined the need for a review of the 2010 Guidance adopted at the time of the last Local Development Plan, explaining that a review had become necessary because two appeals by private developers of student housing had been accepted by Scottish Government Reporters, in effect overturning the Council's Guidance.

The consultation had received 180 responses offering broad support for higher education in the city, qualified support for purpose-built student accommodation, support for identifying key locations and managing density, and expressing concern about HMOs. A report to the Planning Committee on 6 August offered draft revised guidance which would go out to a six-week consultation in October.

The new guidance takes into account the Reporters' view that a 60% density of students near campuses was not too high, a view the Council does not share, though accepting that the level will have to be higher than the current 30% threshold. The Council accepts that students are essentially transient and that they pose concerns for sustainable and balanced communities. Therefore, the proposed guidance steers purpose-built student accommodation towards town centres (nine within Edinburgh) with good public transport links. It is proposed that the word 'adjacent' in the current guidance be replaced with tighter wording 'sharing a boundary with'.

In relation to a strong concern about affordable housing which had been raised before and during the consultation, Ben stated that there would be a requirement for developments of a certain size to have an affordable housing component.

In questions from members, several issues were raised. It was made clear that members were not anti-student, just not keen that any one group should overwhelm others. In other words, a balance must be struck. Moreover, student housing should be built so that it can revert to social housing, if required. There was a strong feeling that there was a democratic deficit when the policies formulated by Councillors, elected by the citizens, were overturned by unelected Scottish Government Reporters. However, the Council was also at fault for selling its properties to the highest bidder rather than seeking to achieve balanced communities. Cllr Perry assured members that officials would be finding out the reasons behind Reporters' decisions and these would be reported back as part of the consultation deliberations.

Ben was asked whether students living in HMOs would form part of assessing a 50% concentration of students, and also why students didn't pay Council tax. He said that the Council would not be able to calculate student density taking into account HMOs, and that clearer information from the universities about their plans and their students' location would help with planning. Cllr Perry said that all these views should be fed back as part of the consultation.

The Chair thanked Ben Wilson and Cllr Perry for their attendance.

2. Police Report from Police Scotland

PC Neil Mackay said that, as of last month, he and PC Ross Stewart were now the officers dedicated to serving Southside/Newington. A further two officers will serve Meadows/Morningside, and more officers are being requested. They will, as often as possible, be on foot patrol dealing with any anti-social behaviour. Since the legislation on legal highs, there had been fewer incidents, though stairwells were still vulnerable, particularly where owners and tenants did not secure the main door. Drug taking is still a problem in the area and there was one arrest for assault and robbery during the Festival. There have been several incidents of shoplifting.

3. Report on Environment and Community Safety from Kevin Hawes, Community Safety Officer, City of Edinburgh Council

Unfortunately, Kevin was not able to be present to give this report. There was a brief discussion of the problems at the former churchyard at 33 Chapel Street, where drug taking is in evidence. Police and Council are aware of the problems and the Greek Orthodox Church has been asked to padlock the gates.

4. Minutes of the meeting of 2 June 2015, and Matters Arising

Matters arising will be dealt with in items later in the Agenda. Agreement to the minutes was proposed by Lisa Sibbald, and seconded by Dora Lola-Luz.

5. Chair's Report

5.1 Proposed New Southside Community Council (SCC)

As discussed at previous meetings, Cllr Orr has been working hard on establishing a new Community Council for the Southside. He is the Returning Officer and the nomination period ends on Monday 7 September. If there are fewer than six nominations, then a new SCC will not be formed. If there are between six and 12 nominations, then those named will form the new CC. If there are more than 12 nominations, an election will be held with the notice of a poll being made on 14 September and the election being held on 28 September. If a new SCC is formed, then up to six local groups are eligible to become nominated members with a representative.

Mrs Theodora (Dora) Lola-Luz, a member of the Southside Association, expressed her willingness to represent the Southside Association on a new Southside Community Council should one be formed. This offer was gratefully received by members, proposed by Maggie Bagan and seconded by Jan Fraser. The paperwork for nominations was duly completed by the Chair for submission by the due date.

Afternote – 11 individuals had put their names forward, and as this number did not exceed 12, they will form the new SCC without the need for an election. Two group nominations had also been confirmed, including the one from the SA (above).

5.2 Edinburgh Doors Open Day

Buildings will be open as part of Doors Open Day weekend on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 September. There will be nine public buildings open in the Southside and two in Newington.

5.3 Future Speakers

6 October - David Spaven, Convenor, Living Streets Edinburgh Group

Other possibilities are:

November - a visit by the new MP for the area, Tommy Sheppard (tbc)

January - a visit by the manager of the University's Free Legal Advice Centre

Further ideas for speakers would be most welcome.

5.4 South Central Community Safety Action Group

A meeting had been held on 25 August and details, including minutes of previous meetings, circulated to members. The next meeting is due to be held in the Mandela Room of the City Chambers on Tuesday 10 November at 2pm.

5.5 Christmas Lights Event at St Patrick Square

At the Council's request, in order to rationalise resources required for various lights events, there was some discussion about dovetailing our event with those of neighbouring community groups. As an economy, it will not be necessary to close the road as everyone can fit into St Patrick Square garden. The Southside event will take place on Tuesday 1 December at 6pm followed by refreshments in the Community Centre. A small group will convene to agree detailed arrangements. **Afternote** – The Council had agreed the date.

5.6 Future of Council Tax

The Chair drew members' attention to a notice from Marco Biagi MSP about a meeting to discuss the future of Council Tax, to be held at St Augustine's Church on George IV Bridge on 9 September at 7pm. All are invited to shape the future of how to pay for public services.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported that there was £1,896.25 in the bank, with £202 yet to be received from Sustrans. Some members' subscriptions are overdue and would be gratefully received.

7. Planning and Licensing Report

7.1 Engine Shed

A planning application is expected for the former Engine Shed which is likely to become a whisky distillery – a tourist attraction with a bar and restaurant.

7.2 Old Royal High School

Members were asked to be aware of the Duddingston House Properties' proposal for converting the Old Royal High School into a hotel. The plans are controversial, with some conservation groups claiming that such a construction would undermine the city's World Heritage status. A counter-proposal from St Mary's Music School is likely to be brought forward.

8. Environmental Matters

8.1 SCNP ward allocation for road/footway project

The SCNP has allocated £50,000 per ward for road and footway improvements and suggested three possible projects:

i) Hill Square

Similar to recent St Patrick Square upgrade, consider continuing high quality Caithness flags currently in Hill Place to Hill Square, from No's 1 to 12. Works to include improvement works to short section of footway (approx 10m) in Richmond Place, to improve pedestrian access. This would coincide with substantial and continued investment from the Royal College of Surgeons and planned redevelopment of University of Edinburgh property on Roxburgh Place, and add to this historic and popular old town location.

ii) St Patrick Square

As a continuation staged project to the recently completed St Patrick Square upgrade, consider continuing high quality Caithness flags currently in place over the East frontage of St Patrick Square, to the South and West footways, which form the rear section of the square (from No's 22 to 39). Works to include small areas setted carriageway repairs. This would continue the upgrade to this historic and popular old town amenity garden area.

iii) West Savile Terrace

Subject to ongoing condition assessment of the existing cherry trees, a project is proposed to resurface the South footway, from the Reid Memorial Church to the junction with Watertoun Road, to include new tree pits (increase in dimensions from 1m² to 2m²) and in conjunction with Forestry, replace specimen trees, as required. This will address historic root damage to the existing footway, sympathetically replace popular flowering cherries and ensure sufficient room to mature without further issues.

Tim, our SCNP representative, consulted members who agreed to the first two suggestions. In relation to option iii) at West Savile Terrace, there was a strong feeling that the cherry trees should not be removed. The alternative third option of work to upgrade Montague Street was discussed, although it was unclear whether this work was already programmed in for 2017. Tim agreed to find out. There was also a plea that the pavement outside the Bargain Stores on St Patrick Street be raised, possibly by means of a double kerb.

8.2 Environmental Report September 2015 by Hilary McDowell

The long-planned mural was eventually painted in the week starting Saturday 25 July. A lot of work was required to prepare the surface and the weather was wet. However, by Sunday 2 August, the artist and volunteers had completed the work, with huge support from the adjacent Marmaris Restaurant, a visit by our new MP and three features in the Evening News. Unfortunately, graffiti appeared but the area was quickly repainted and a coat of protective varnish applied to the entire project. A Facebook page records the project and many more people walk through the street now than previously, with a new sense of space. A postcard of the mural is proposed and costings will be obtained. The cycle route should soon be completed, with an official opening.

A 'walkabout' has been scheduled later in September with Kathy Evans of community safety and Alan Dunlop of roads to look at the state of pavements and pedestrian provision in the area. How commercial bins are dealt with is a particular concern which will be examined. Flyposting was not well handled at this year's Festival and it is particularly noticeable at the Odeon. The threat of legal action against flyposters is perceived as an empty one, but the law should be enforced. Bins overflowing with litter were extremely unattractive and persisted throughout the Festival.

The Underbelly circus site on the Meadows is still to be formally assessed, particularly the state of the grass. Although more care seems to have been taken than occurred under the Ladyboys' management, and there appears to have been less noise and less litter, it would be good if the Council had consulted more about the use of the Meadows, especially the length of time the site was used during the Festival.

9. Report from, and Question and Answer Session with, the attending Councillor

- 9.1 Cllr Rose spoke about the Rose Street trial of managing commercial bins, and not permitting them a permanent place on the street or pavement, and hoped that this would soon be rolled out in Southside/Newington.
- 9.2 The Odeon is still owned by Duddingston House Properties and has not been sold: Cllr Rose suggested that building might benefit from the boarding up of the front steps which would discourage beggars.
- 9.3 Jan mentioned that a bus stop on Buccleuch Street is set too far back on the pavement, restricting the ability of pedestrians to walk on the pavement. Cllr Rose promised to investigate.

9.4 Questions were also raised about the new cycle route, where priority for cyclists sometimes conflicts with priority for pedestrians and it was noted that similar conflicts arise in Holyrood Park. It was thought that these concerns would best be raised via the new Community Council.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 6 October at 7pm in Room 1, South Side Community Centre.