

## West End Community Council Minute

**7th of May 2019** at Ashfield, 61 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7HL

Present: Gordon Wyllie (in the Chair), Ian Robertson (Vice Chair), David Duncan (Secretary), Alan Weddell (Treasurer), Isabel Thom (Planning), Colin Johnston, Martha Baur, Gordon Renton, Cllr. Claire Miller, Cllr. Hal Osler and the Very Rev'd John Conway.

Discussion	Action
<p><b>1. Apologies and welcome</b></p> <p>A warm welcome was extended to everyone attending. Apologies were received from or on behalf of, Deidre Brock MP, Ruth Davidson MSP, Cllr. Alasdair Rankin, Cllr. Karen Doran, Cllr. Gavin Barrie, Cllr. Iain Whyte, Cllr. Max Mitchell, Susan Purnell (Police Scotland), Cameron Buchanan and Alex Milne.</p>	
<p><b>2. Minute of meeting held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2019</b></p> <p>The Minute from last meeting was approved subject to a typographical correction. (Manor Place instead of Manning Street)</p>	
<p><b>3. Community Council development and forthcoming elections</b></p> <p>The Chairman distributed prints of the thoughts and suggestions which had been circulated with the agenda and advised that he, Ian Robertson and David Duncan would be meeting next Monday to consider these. In the meantime members were asked to identify the three most urgent and the three most important items and hand them in at Ashfield prior to then.</p>	
<p><b>4. Police Report</b></p> <p>As no members of the Police Force were in attendance, no Police report was delivered. Regarding the absence of Police Officers at this and recent meetings it was noted that further reorganisation is in train, that allocations of Community Police Officers are being redistributed and that 12 officers are being lost from the City Centre ward.</p> <p>David Duncan will notify Police Scotland of the WECC meeting times and dates. In the hope they will begin attending again.</p>	
<p><b>5. South East Locality and Neighbourhood Partnership</b></p> <p>There was nothing to report.</p>	
<p><b>6. City Councillors' report</b></p> <p>Cllr's. Claire Miller and Hal Osler advised that a meeting of the Transport and Environment Group would be meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May when the implications of a report on a low emission zone would be considered. The Holidays Lets Working Group were looking in to planning and safety issues raised by the Fire and Rescue service, and a Scottish Government consultation had been launched in connection with issues arising from short term lets. Any current problems should be reported to the City Council and in appropriate cases the Police should be called on 101. A meeting was taking place with local Police and it was noted that a post mortem report was awaited with</p>	

regard to the recent murder of a flat dweller in Chester Street. Whose family had been relocated and given Police protection. The successful removal of A Boards from City Centre pavements was being followed up by the Transport and Environment Committee with a motion to remove display goods in appropriate cases so as to allow a clear 2 metres of breadth for walking up to the kerb. Colin Johnston raised an issue regarding an Irish-themed public house and it was noted that noise problems should be reported via the Council website.

Colin Johnston raised a number of points in connection with illuminated signage on the Canning Tower. In response Cllr. Hal Osler mentioned that in her position of sitting on the Planning Committee for the city that she and her team have turned down hundreds of planning permissions over the years pertaining to advertising boards and the lighting/reflection levels coming from these.

### **7. Tourism Meeting**

The Culture and Community Committee under Cllr. Donald Wilson would be holding a fact-finding meeting with representative groups and Community Councils on the following day. The WECC would be represented by Gordon Wyllie and Isabel Thom.

### **8. Finance**

The balance in the Community Council's favour was £795.07

### **9. St Mary's Cathedral Workshop SC017273**

The Very Reverend John Conway as Provost of the Cathedral Church of St Mary the Virgin reported on the genesis of the mason's yard with as St Mary's Cathedral Workshop SC017273 support from what became Historic Scotland with a renovation and repair programme in which connection 25 years funding had been provided, which expired 5 years ago. A new model arrangement had been adopted to carry matters forward which involved the recruitment of 6 apprentices per training period instead of 2, and the introduction of outside placements. This model turned out not to be sustainable as the contributions made by outside employers did not cover the costs. On account of progress made on the built fabric of the Cathedral, Historic Environment Scotland had not been able to justify continuation of the grant and the Construction Industry Training Board had refused support as the Cathedral workshop was not a construction company. The net annual cost of running the workshop was in the region of £200,000. The Provost went on to say that although it had been necessary to cease operations for the meantime he was willing to offer up the workshop free of charge, to any commercial or other concern willing to resume operations on the understanding that masons utilising the workshop would also carry out occasional repairs on the Cathedral. The two members of staff who operated the workshop had found alternative employment elsewhere, however it was suggested that they would be willing to return to the scheme if funding was secured for it. It was agreed that the Community Council would write letters of support to the list and constituency MSP's for Edinburgh, Mrs Christine Jardine the local MP, Skills Development Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland.

### **10. Planning**

Isabel Thom as Planning Convenor spoke to the report which she had circulated prior to the meeting. It was noted that the application by Diageo to turn the erstwhile House of Fraser building at the West End of Princes Street into a Johnnie Walker Experience site would be coming before the Planning Committee on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May.

<p>HM Revenue and Customs, who currently occupy Meldrum House on the corner of Drumsheugh Place are moving and the building has been acquired by an English property developer. They are seeking to turn the building into 120 rental apartments for business usage. Andrew Munnis is the point of contact.</p> <p>Mrs Thom referred to the newspaper article by Cliff Hague, a print of which is annexed</p>	
<p><b>11. AOCB</b></p> <p>Evidence has been found to show that the public realm outside the restaurant Kyloë at the West End is public land and should be kept as such.</p>	
<p><b>12. Date of the next Community Council meeting</b></p> <p>4th of June</p> <p>Subsequent dates: 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 6<sup>th</sup> of August, 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 5<sup>th</sup> of November and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December.</p>	

#### Appendix 1. Tourism and Communities Elected Members Working Group

Gordon Wyllie and Isabel Thom attended the meeting chaired by Cllr. Donald Wilson on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May when views and experiences were sought from Community Councils and other bodies represented. It was noted that the WECC, while conscious that tourism is a most important industry, feels that what is good for the residents is good for the tourists, it is not necessarily so the other way round and that the City should be attracting high-spend tourists by offering a quality experience. The WECC indicated strong support of the City Councils initiative regarding a sojourn tax at a realistic level with special equality-led arrangements for camp sites etc and if possible hypothecated to items like litter collection, the improvement of road and pavement surfaces, and the provision of public toilets. Any questions should be raised with the Ward Councillors

#### Appendix 2. Newspaper article anent Edinburgh City Centre

# Edinburgh's iconic heart is in danger of being ripped out



The city council must act to protect Princes Street Gardens as developers move in, writes Cliff Hague

What will the heart of Edinburgh – the Waverley Valley from St Cuthbert's in the west to Regent Road in the east – be like in ten years' time?

What do the citizens of Edinburgh want this definitive part of our city to be used for? How should its future be decided and by whom? These questions matter because significant changes are underway, and there is a risk that a series of piecemeal decisions could deliver overall outcomes that nobody really wanted.

Surprisingly for such an iconic place, there is no plan that looks at this area as a whole: instead it is being treated in bits, which carries the risk that by 2030 we end up with the whole being less than the sum of the parts that we have today.

Worked up proposals for West Princes Street Gardens are expected soon. These follow from the international design competition staged a couple of years ago. The centre-piece will be a new performance arena to replace the Ross Bandstand.

However, a visitor centre with café/restaurant built with an entry from Princes Street is also likely to be part of the design. There will be an upgraded family area on what is now the red blaise and children's playground near the fountain, and a new use for the south-facing shelters, as well as a new, bigger bridge over the railway at the King Stables Road entrance. Just how all of this will fit into the landscape of the gardens is something that will need to be looked at carefully. There is certainly scope to enhance the existing gardens, but it is important to remember that the thing that people most love about them is that they provide much loved peace and tranquillity in the centre of the

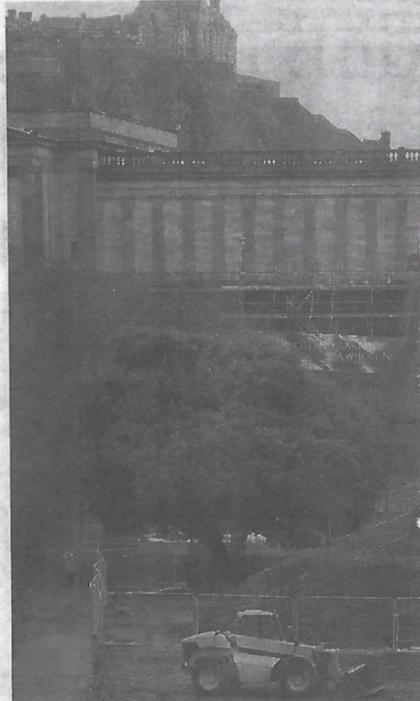
city, and are open to all for free. The Cockburn Association believes that Princes Street Gardens should be just that – gardens. We worry that the provision of a major "world-leading" venue for gigs will see a creep to staging more large events. If that were to happen then ten years from now West Princes Street Gardens would become a performance arena with supporting catering, set amongst some residual grass and trees. In all this, the business plan and risk assessment will need careful public scrutiny: if income falls short of expectations, will the financial gap have to be filled by more high profile events?

The design of the new facilities matters too. Those listening to concerts in the Royal Parks in London hire deck chairs, so the character remains that of a park: permanent seating would tip the balance towards an entertainment venue.

Currently the area around the National Gallery is blocked off while construction work proceeds, following the felling of trees just before the Christmas Market began. This is a reminder that the scale of change proposed for West Princes Street Gardens implies a substantial period when they will be transformed into a building site.

Meanwhile East Princes Street Gardens effectively has been converted into a funfair for the couple of months around Christmas and again for the period in the summer around the festival. In the periods in between, there is turf to be re-laid and other damage to be restored.

In many respects, these already highly commercialised "gardens" would be a better site for the new performance arena, since the steeper valley offers a more natural amphitheatre. By not having any proper plan for the valley, such an option probably has been lost.



Princes Street Gardens East, pictured in February, during work on a revamp of the National Galleries

A permission was recently granted to add two storeys to the top of the Waverley Market, despite the damage this will do to the dramatic views of North Bridge and beyond to the coast, and despite this representing a departure from planning policy over the last 40 years.

Now Network Rail has come forward with another very significant, but again "one off", proposal to raise the roof, literally, at Waverley Station. They are currently consulting on a "vision" for a "world-class environment" (yes, another one), premised on the assumption that in 20 years' time, there will be twice as many people using the station.

Again, few would argue with the idea that the station could be improved, and the proposal to re-plan areas adjacent to the station also makes sense. But again what we see is the city council working in a corporate manner to deliver a major project proposed and led by the developer.

Instead of looking at the valley as a whole and consulting with the public on an integrated plan which is then used to inform and regulate development, the council is in reactive mode, and the consultation process is fragmented into an invitation to endorse a series of disconnected proposals.

Thus, before answering the consultation questions on the development of the station and its new

retailing concourse, readers are reassured that "the Masterplan proposals must recognise the architecture and heritage value of both the station and the surrounding area".

That is true, but it is not the same as having a conservation-based approach to the development. What is on offer is a station that will be "more pleasant ... safer ... more efficient". What's not to like?

So when you come to the final question – "the preferred Masterplan requires a trade-off between the extent of existing historic structure that is retained and the benefits delivered by modern reconstruction. To what extent do you agree that the preferred masterplan strategy achieves the right balance?" – you know what your answer should be! An integrated plan would look at all these sites and surrounding areas together. To the south, the edge of the valley is stable in terms of major development, following the unloved and bland developments at New Street that are now in place, architecturally treating the centre of Edinburgh like it was a business park in Middlesex.

However, to the north there are many questions. How do we want Princes Street to relate to the valley below? More fundamentally still, what is the future of Princes Street once the new St James Quarter (which, of course, will be "world renowned") opens? The plight of

retailers is well known: who will make the move to the new mall, and what will replace them on Princes Street?

Will Princes Street 2030 be a row of hotels and ground-floor cafes or "experiences", like Johnny Walker in the former House of Fraser at the West End? Last but not least, what will Calton Hill be like if the Scottish Government approves the proposed "world-class" hotel there that attracted over 3,000 objections? Edinburgh urgently needs an integrated plan for the whole Waverley valley that is based on an impartial public consultation in which the views of civic society are fully taken into account.

Bit by bit, spin by spin, council officials are responding to commercial pressures by divesting Edinburgh's citizens of one of the jewels of their inheritance, the Waverley valley. Instead of a long-term plan for the whole, we have a bits-and-pieces, developer-led approach, where anything goes as long as it is labelled "world class" and promises more jobs, tourists and GDP. Damage has already been done, and more is in the pipeline waiting to be nodded through. Unless we change direction now, over the next few years the qualities that make Edinburgh's centre special will be traded away forever.

Cliff Hague is chair of the Cockburn Association

Appendix 3. Letter to Donald Wilson about the Christmas fair

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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Mr David A Duncan  
Secretary, West End Community Council  
1 Orchard Place  
EDINBURGH  
EH4 2ET

Date 5 March 2019  
Your ref  
Our ref DW/EM

Dear David

**Location of the Christmas Market**

Thank you for your letter and suggestions regarding the location of the Christmas Market. The views you express are certainly not ones with which I am unfamiliar.

Discussions are taking place at the moment with Underbelly who deliver this event on behalf of the Council. There are contractual obligations to consider however, I can assure you the views you express are part of these discussions.

Furthermore this is the last year of the present contract and your views can help with discussions as we go forward. It is a principle of mine to widen and deepen the impact and benefits of Edinburgh's Festivals and what you are suggesting fits very well with this.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Donald Wilson**  
Sighthill/Gorgie Ward



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