Merchiston Community Council — Minutes of Public Business Meeting (Zoom meeting)

Date: 18 October 2022

Chaired by Ian Doig, Chair of Merchiston Community Council (MCC)

Started: 19:00.
Ended: 20.55

Present:
MCC Members: Ian Doig (ID, Chair), Vivien Kitteringham (VK, Vice-Chair), Frances Hawarden (FH, Treasurer), Mairianna Clyde (MC), Joan Houston (JH), Roma Menlowe (RM, Minute taker), Ewan Klein (EK, Zoom host), John McKenna (JMK).

Councillor Marie-Clair Munro (MCM, Scottish Conservative, Ward 10).

Residents: Kay Smith (KS), Annette Lumsden, Mary Breatnach (MB), unnamed resident from West Linton Village Centre.

Business Meeting

1 Introduction, Apologies & Declarations of Interest

There were apologies from: Daniel Cairns (Secretary), Helen Zealley, Raina Bergasse, Bridget Stevens, Cllrs Walker, Parker & Cowdy.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of Public Meeting on 20 September; Matters Arising
The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2022 were approved as amended and circulated. There were no matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda.

3 Chair's Report
ID spoke to his report (circulated in advance). The CEO of EVOC, Bridie Ashrowan, would give a presentation to the 15th November public meeting of MCC. This would cover a broad range of topics including the role of community councils in supporting those severely affected by the current cost of living crisis, and the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Edinburgh. ID paid tribute to the work of JH and HZ who had launched the second annual leaf-clearing project in Merchiston. It was a huge amount of work and the 2022 project had started extremely well. ID drew attention to increasing concerns around traffic (including HGV) volumes and illegal parking in Merchiston streets. Action on this lay with the police and traffic wardens. It had proved frustratingly difficult to enlist the relevant Police division in MCC meetings – or even to extract a report from them on crime and disorder issues in the area. ID would keep pushing and MCM offered to support any approaches to Police Scotland. MB drew attention to frequent infringements of the 'no entry' sign to traffic

moving north from Yeaman Place up Merchiston Avenue. Drivers seemed oblivious to signs on pavement poles & on the carriageway. KS mentioned that Fountain News, at the foot of Yeaman Place, persisted in putting large flower containers on the pavement just at the junction with Dundee Street – narrowing the pavement just where pedestrians waited to cross the busy intersection. ID referred to cars idling – illegally - near George Watson's School, waiting for children at the end of the school day. MCM would write again to traffic wardens encouraging them to patrol. Fixed penalty notices could be issued on the spot for idling (and for failure to purchase a parking ticket). MCM would also speak to the Head of Watson's Junior School.

4. Planning Report

MC spoke to her planning report (circulated) & drew attention to two applications for holiday lets in the area which had been refused.

The main application for consideration was the very large proposal for a large housing development at **Dundee Street (Planning Application 22/04045/AMC),** which would back on to the Union Canal. She had serious concerns about the massing and height of the proposed blocks on the towpath side (7 storeys, with little surface relief). The south-facing elevations were markedly higher than proposed in the original plans. Overall, she found the design drab and bland; JMK concurred. The development, now larger than first proposed, was for 464 homes; 48% would be 2 and 3-bed units. This would create a sizeable community of around 1000 people. The ideas for ground source heat pumps had been abandoned. Landscaped areas looked attractive on paper but there were questions over long-term maintenance.

Members echoed these reservations. KS asked about the impact on basic public services (transport, drainage) of such a large new community. MCM observed that CEC was under pressure from the Scottish Government to create more affordable housing; but there were concerns over the impact of such developments on city infrastructure and, besides, the homes proposed for this site were too small for most families. MC would convene a small working group of members to study the proposals in detail and prepare a response on behalf of MCC. CEC had granted some extra time for this.

MC noted that objections to the revised proposals for a café on **Yeaman Place** had not reached the threshold for reference to the Development Planning Committee. This application would therefore be determined by CEC planning officers. MCC had submitted an objection.

5. Licensing Report

In BS's absence, the meeting noted her report (already circulated) which confirmed there were no new licensing applications to consider.

6. Polwarth Pavement project

RM spoke to the progress report. The first phase of this project focused on the **Polwarth roundabout** and was now entering an important and active phase with the gathering of community views through a survey in November, available in both leaflet and digital form. At the same time, she & JMK were pressing ahead with other strands of work: seeking

access to CEC's previous traffic counts for the Yeaman Place 'corridor' and commissioning updates; sourcing expertise for the visualisation of pavement improvements; & reviewing existing CEC commitments for the area in the current and proposed local development plans. From informal consultations to date with both residents and businesses, a strong consensus had emerged on the need for measures to improve safety for pavement users and cyclists and to raise general amenity in the area near the roundabout. The survey and traffic counts would provide harder data. RM & JMK had also had the first of several planned training sessions with Planning Aid Scotland, to ensure that the project follows best practice in community engagement. This had been extremely useful. A follow-up would be organised for late November, when collation and analysis of the survey data would begin. RM expressed MCC's appreciation to residents, to PAS, and to City councillors for their support to date. It would be useful to pencil in a presentation to MCC on the project for early 2023. ID welcomed the progress and invited JMK & RM to assume they had delegated authority to incur expenditure from the community grant that had been given to MCC up to £1000 (on, eg, publicity, survey materials, traffic counts) without further reference to MCC (note: the total CEC grant amounts to £3,795).

7. Leaf Clearing Project 2022

JH reported a strong start to the 2022 leaf-clearing exercise. Some 221 bags of leaves had already been filled by residents and volunteers and collected by CEC. Some 70 volunteers from last year had been re-recruited. CEC was using a mechanical sweeper to reinforce residents' efforts. Leaflets had been delivered to every address in Merchiston Avenue, inviting residents to ask for bags and explaining the collection arrangements. Students at Watson's would clear Tipperlinn & Colinton Roads and Merchiston Gardens.

8. Treasurer's Report

MCC had a healthy balance of nearly £7000, including the "ring fenced" CEC grant for the Polwarth Pavement project. There were no issues needing discussion.

The topic of MCC's compliance with GDPR was raised; and there was a brief discussion of several key questions, such as whether MCC was under an obligation to register with the ICO and, even if not, how best to ensure that MCC as a statutory and public body was fully compliant with the requirements for good data protection practice, including secure and respectful handling of any personal data collected from residents. EK pointed to the policy statement on MCC's website on data handling and privacy. Since this matter was not essentially one of ICT, it did not fall naturally to the Communications Group within MCC. ID would consider further how best to progress MCC's thinking on this important issue. EACC was exercised about it and might produce a policy (for itself or perhaps for all of Edinburgh's community councils) in due course.

9. City Councillors' Reports

MCM reported that vehicle speeding, especially in Bruntsfield from the King's Theatre to Holy Corner - was now an issue. Police Scotland had agreed to use hand-held speed cameras to monitor the situation. This would need to be considered in tandem with safer routes to school. Essential work by Scottish Water on drains serving Warrender Park Crescent had led to large ground works on the Meadows and the digging up of a substantial wild flower meadow. Scottish Water had given assurances that the meadow would be

restored. Businesses in Bruntsfield were planning another Christmas shopping event, with some support from CEC, to promote local and seasonal shopping in the run-up to the holidays. There was an issue relating to Fountain News at the foot of Yeaman Place, in that vaping kits had allegedly been sold by this business to under-age adolescents. MCM also reported that there had been a rise in burglary and theft in Morningside (and presumably also in Merchiston, though Police Scotland had not provided any data).

10. Edinburgh Association of Community Councils (EACC) (for decision)
The background to EACC's proposal for a new management board was set out at paragraph 5 of the Chair's report and in the paper circulated with the agenda. MCC members voted to re-elect the 4 existing office bearers of EACC. Members welcomed ID's willingness to stand for election to the new EACC Management Board and voted unanimously to select him as MCC's candidate. The task of completing relevant forms was remitted to ID.

11. Issues raised by residents
None were raised.

12. Other reports and correspondence (for noting)
There were none on this occasion. ID again noted with regret the absence of Police Scotland reports and would redouble his efforts to secure them, and hoped all ward councillors would support him in that.

13. Any other business – none.

14. Future meeting date
Confirmed as Tuesday 15 November at 7pm. There will not be any public meeting in December.

Merchiston Community Council .October 2022.

Merchiston Community Council

Chair's Report – October 2022

1. **Overview** – One of the biggest problems facing our community continues to be escalating cost-of-living, especially increasing energy costs, food prices, escalating mortgage and borrowing costs affecting both householders and businesses, plus inflation overall having risen dramatically to around 10%, 5 times the Government target of 2%. There is currently great uncertainty about many issues, including funding, and sustainability of public services, and an increasing need for charities and other community groups to support residents and families, especially the most vulnerable.

   To discuss these issues, I have arranged for MCC's 15th November meeting for Bridie Ashrowan, Chief Executive of the well-respected and influential Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council (www.evoc.org.uk) to give a presentation and lead a discussion about activities by the Third Sector in Edinburgh in working in partnerships with communities and with Edinburgh City Council (CEC). Topics for discussion are likely to include measures to alleviate poverty, food banks, support in the energy crisis, mental health and NHS issues, loneliness, and support for Ukrainian and other refugees.

   Bin Collection and Waste Disposal – Unclear what progress CEC is making in its previous policy of rolling out new Communal Bin Hubs to Merchiston – I invite our Ward Councillors to give an update.

   I heard from a CEC representative at a recent EACC meeting that Edinburgh City Council is investigating a new type of large underground communal bins. These are in operation in Liverpool and seem a promising innovation. Underground bins would however need different specialist vehicles to empty and transport rubbish. I understand that CEC is evaluating costs and logistics.

2. **Clean Up Merchiston!** We can be proud that Merchiston is a lovely area to live and work. A key role for MCC is encouraging active community participation and awareness.

   The recent bin strike reminds us how throwaway society has become! Nationally and locally, litter is a matter of significant public concern, and cost to the public purse.

   Let's mount a Clean Up Merchiston campaign! Litter disfigures our neighbourhood.

   There is a need to persuade people NOT to dump litter on our pavements, streets, parks, and public spaces! CEC is very constrained in the resources it can devote to cleaning up litter. Councils do not create litter but do not have the resources to clear

it all up - it is thoughtless people who create litter by assuming someone else will magically clear up their litter and dispose of it at public expense!

People Against Litter Campaign Website: http://www.peopleagainstlitter.org)

Leaf Clearing - There will be a report later in the meeting on the excellent MCC Leaf Clearing Project. I would like to take this opportunity to record particular thanks to our two dedicated champions, Helen Zealley and Joan Houston, for their leadership in managing and coordinating this work superbly! A great example of community empowerment in action and in demonstrating that "many hands make light work"! Thanks also recorded to those residents who are participating enthusiastically, and to City of Edinburgh Council for providing behind the scenes support by supply of black bags, gloves, brushes, and taking leaves away for composting.

Several residents have spotted occasional CEC street sweeper vehicles in the vicinity, an encouraging sign. I also spotted a squad of litter-picker workers, wearing fluorescent jackets and using yellow litter-picker tools, brushes, and "scaffie" barrows – remember those! Whether CEC, local firms, or volunteers is unknown, but very welcome.

3. **Road Safety Issues**. I am concerned about increasing breaches of the Highway Code. Offences include vehicles parking illegally on double yellow lines, parking with 2 wheels on the pavement and thereby obstructing public throughfares and blocking sight lines for motorists and pedestrians (delivery vehicles are particularly guilty), speeding vehicles in residential areas.

   A further recurring complaint yet again is irresponsible cyclists - including illegally cycling on pavements including cycling round blind corners on pavements, illegally ignoring red stop lights and riding through Green Man pedestrian crossing signs, illegally cycling with no lights and with no bell signals, wrong way in one-way streets etc. MCC has complained about irresponsible cyclists for years, but nothing seems to get done to protect the public, especially pedestrians and children. Why are Police Scotland and CEC not enforcing the laws? We are also now experiencing a growing hazard of e-scooters, which are illegal on pavements and roads, except on private ground.

4. **Format of MCC Meetings – Zoom v Teams v Physical Meetings?** MCC recently reviewed the format of future public meetings. There are advantages and disadvantages in both virtual and in-person meetings. Experience suggests that virtual meeting result in greater numbers participating in MCC meetings. A further wave of Covid is expected this winter and congregating in an enclosed hall could increase infection risks, especially for vulnerable people. Therefore, on balance, MCC has decided to continue with virtual meetings meantime and will review again in spring 2023.

   EICC proposes to switch from Zoom meetings to Microsoft Teams. Partly because this will facilitate participation by Police Scotland, CEC, and other public bodies

(which, as a policy, will not use Zoom because of perceptions of security issues), and partly because Teams appears cheaper and more flexible than Zoom.

EICC recommends that community councils consider switching to Teams. The basic Teams facility appears to be free, however, there are doubts about over-complexity and MCC might have to pay extra for enhanced facilities such as to record chat comments, a polling facility, breakout room facility etc. Needs further investigation.

Recommendation: I suggest MCC remits discussion of Zoom versus Teams, plus other ICT issues including archiving, to our Communications Group for recommendations.

5. **EACC (Edinburgh Association of Community Councils**). EACC has been noticeably stepping up its activities and has ambitions to do much more as an umbrella group to support all 46 community councils across Edinburgh, providing support but enabling each CC to remain independent and focussed on its own activities, which vary from CC to CC.

   EACC is setting up a new management Board at its AGM on 24th November. The objective is to supplement and support the work of the 4 Office Bearers and to increase direct participation by more community councils across Edinburgh.

   I currently represent MCC on EACC and have also been appointed to a Board Steering Group, and to a Financial Management Best Practice Review Group.

   As Chair of MCC, I am willing to put my name forward as a candidate for election to the new EICC Board. This issue will be discussed under item 11 on tonight's agenda (see separate message from EACC Secretary).

6. **Associates 2022-23 –** Proposals for 2022-23 are awaited from George Watson's College and Steiner School. Boroughmuir High School nominated Amelie Haag and Sam Moore, and they were appointed at September's MCC public meeting.

7. **Email Messages** – I and other MCC members can be swamped with emails from numerous sources! **To assist members in keeping track of MCC emails, I suggest that members show at the beginning of each email subject line "MCC -", then the subject. That would assist us all to keep track of increasing number of emails!**

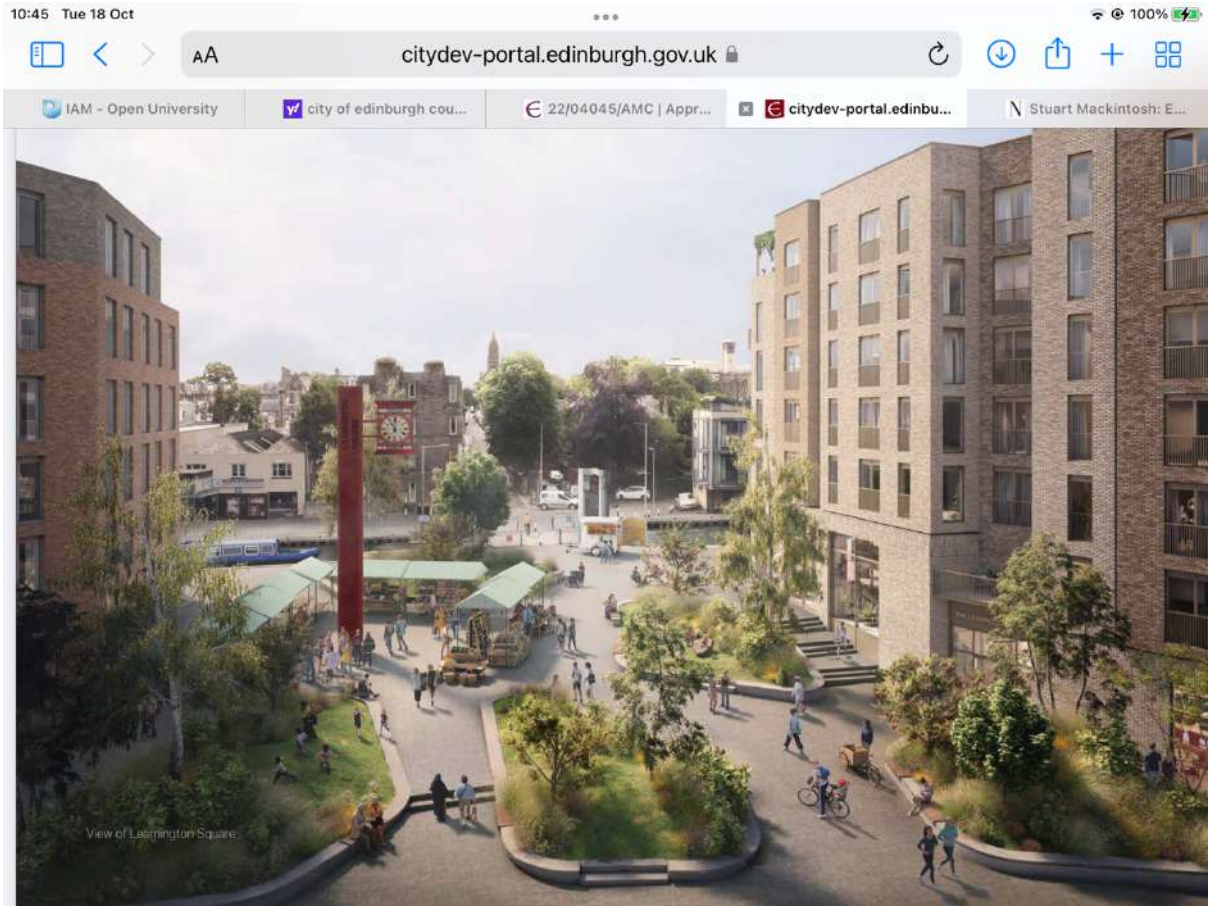
   Ian Doig. Merchiston CC Chair. October 2022.

Planning report 18 October 2022

1. Two short-term let (STLs) applications have been refused. 8 Dorset Place (Flat 2) and 55 Ashley Terrace (2F1).
2. The proposal to replace lamps at the Tennis and Bowling Club with LEDs has been given a certificate of lawfulness (CLP). Whilst LEDs save on power consumption, they can have a negative effect on wildlife.
3. There's an application to put in a black flue for a wood-burning stove at 72 Polwarth Gardens (22/04913/FUL). It's in a garden room (a low one-storey wooden 'shed' built in the garden) that backs onto the canal across from Ogilvie Terrace. It's 20 cm wide by 1.50m high. As with 8a Napier Road high trees bound the rear edge of the property.

4. We have been given extra time by planning officer Graham Fraser to comment on the major development at Fountainbridge. This is a massive and complex development, and our views are sought. (22/04045/AMC). We have until 31 October. My biggest concern is the height and massing of the very tall block (7 storeys) that will front the towpath. See the image below. Previous masterplans always proposed a stepping arrangement with the lowest heights along the towpath and the highest heights along Dundee Street and Fountainbridge. This massing impact is partially compensated for by the buildings being further back from the towpath, leaving a large area of public space below (larger than at present). Also, the ground level will have arcaded shop units, which will increase the public space by the width of the arcades and provide open-air shelter underneath the arcades. This is an attractive feature. The landscaping and courtyard features within the development are attractive provided they can be maintained but I have concerns about daylighting for the planting, given the building heights. There are large numbers of 'Juliette' balconies throughout the development and some real balconies for the lucky few. Juliettes are ones where there is no balcony to speak of, just a safety railing that allows residents to open tall floor-to-ceiling windows internally. I wouldn't have thought them child-safe.

The design quality of the buildings is poor. Very bland and bleak looking. The palette of materials however consists mainly of a buff brick which is not unattractive.



An objection by MCC has been submitted for the proposed change of use of 36-38 Yeaman Place from a car parts shop to a cafe (Class 3) as there remains concerns about the hatch and rear windows and confusion about the full height, sliding doors/fixed pane, new glazed unit by the towpath, as we discussed at a previous meeting. 19 comments were received so it will be decided on delegated powers. (22/04369/FUL).

MERCHISTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING OCTOBER 2022

UPDATE ON POLWARTH PAVEMENT PROJECT

The key points to note since the update for September are as follows:

- **Survey materials** are now close to finalisation: there will be a survey form in leaflet style and also an online form for those who prefer to respond that way;

- The survey materials have been influenced by a range of very useful comments and suggestions from residents; and by constructive contributions from Planning Aid Scotland (PAS); we now think they have been adequately 'road-tested'

- The survey will take place in November and will be open for **4 weeks**; during that period we hope to mount at least one weekend **street event** to encourage uptake;

- Electronic responses will be collated and analysed using Google forms; leaflet responses will be entered manually and, depending on the volume, this may take a little while to process;

- Alongside this work, the MCC team (Roma and John at present) are receiving valuable **coaching from PAS** on community engagement and on the processing of survey data – this is in line with the approved grant from CEC;

- We are also pursuing other strands of activity: we are exploring the options for **traffic counts,** using guidance by Sustrans as our starting point; we are in discussions with a firm of **landscape architects** about visualisations and costings for priority improvements as defined by the community; and we plan to re-open **discussions with CEC** to ensure that officers as well as elected members are up to date with our progress.

- The project is now entering its most active phase since the spring of 2022. With the help and support of residents. we will soon begin to get a clear idea of the community's views on a range of safety and amenity matters near the Polwarth roundabout and will be able to present what we hope will be a **constructive set of proposals for improvement** to the City of Edinburgh Council by end March 2023.

John McKenna & Roma Menlowe

October 2022

Merchiston Community Council

Merchiston Leaf Clearing Project: 2022

1sr October 2022:

Round 'robin letter' sent to 70 Volunteers from 2021 to inform them that the Merchiston Leaf Clearing Project was being re-launched for 2022.

By 14 October 2022:

- 38 deliveries of bags have been requested – and delivered - to Volunteers, Including to 4 new Volunteers

  In addition 7 people have linked with core Volunteers to join clearing Groups

AND

- There have been 3 reports to the Council of filled bags awaiting uplift:
  - on 4 October - 33 bags
  - on 10 October - 86 bags
  - on 13 October – 52bags

IN ADDITION

Because of the work that Merchiston Volunteers are doing – collecting and bagging up leaves - the Council has undertaken two sessions with its gutter sweeping machine

- one on South Ettrick Road; and

- another on the main road section of Polwarth Terrace where they were able to uncover and expose street drains – some of which a completely blocked and are being reported to the Council

JMH and HZ