Merchiston Community Council

**Minutes of the Public Meeting of Merchiston Community Council**
**Tuesday 17th January 2023 at 19.00 by Zoom.**

**Attendees:** Ian Doig (ID) MCC Chair
Vivien Kitteringham (VK) MCC Vice-chair, Minutes taker
Frances Hawarden (FH) MCC Treasurer
John McKenna (JMcK) MCC
Joan Houston (JH) MCC
Ewan Klein (EK) MCC, Zoom Host
Roma Menlowe (RM) MCC
Declan Murray (DM) MCC
Bridget Stevens (BS) MCC
Mairianna Clyde (MC) MCC
Daniel Cairns (MCC) Secretary (from approx. 20:00)
Fiona Lough (FL) Fountainbridge Canalside Community Trust (FCCT)
Councillor Val Walker (VW) Ward 9
Councillor Ben Parker (BP) Ward 10
George Burrows (GB) Cohousing Options in Southern Scotland (CHOISS)

1. **Introduction by Chair**
   **Apologies for Absence:**
   Helen Zealley (MCC)
   Councillor Neil Ross
   Councillor David Key
   Councillor Marie-Claire Munro
   **Declarations of Interests:** VK is a member of CHOISS, which is seeking support for a local development to be discussed under residents' issues.

2. **Minutes of Public Meeting of 15th November** were ratified unanimously. No matters arising outwith those on the agenda.

3. **Chair's Report** (ID) (appended)
   ID refers to the main points of his report:
   a. Restated the remit of MCC, including working on community projects, commenting on local planning and licensing issues, representing residents and improving the local area.
   b. The success of leaf-clearing project 2022, culminating in a "thank-you" reception at Polwarth Church Hall. Many thanks go to the volunteers on the project and in particular to JH and HZ for organising and overseeing the project.
   c. The Bruntsfield shops reported a brisk Christmas period and that many residents appear to be shopping locally more often. Some reasons for this include finding the city centre less attractive and often too busy.
   d. Lack of resources at CEC meaning council tax and charges for services likely to increase considerably and services likely to be reduced over the coming years, with communities suffering damaging cuts.
   e. The cost of living crisis and inflation eroding people's ability to take part in activities previously enjoyed or to buy from and support local businesses.

f. The deposit-return scheme due to be introduced imminently, businesses' unwillingness to register and possible unintended consequences, such as possible withdrawal of kerbside recycling for bottles and cans.
g. 9 Meetings attended by the chair in November, December and January, including Edinburgh Association of Community Councils (EACC) meetings and board meetings and the SW Community Grants Funding Panel.

Discussion:

Councillor BP: All parties are trying to find creative ways to budget by February 23rdd when CEC budget will be set. CEC is looking at the deposit return scheme locally.
Leaves gathered from the roadside are not composted due to contaminants – is there a way round this?
Councillor VW: There will probably not be a big Council Tax increase due to cost-of-living crisis but charges will have to increase. Money for road and pavement maintenance likely to be protected.
ID: MCC hopes distribution of money to Community Councils and community grants (relatively small amounts) will continue.
Reiterates that roads are in a very bad state, with many complaints and claims against the council

**4. Planning Report**

MC, Planning Lead:

**a.** Revised application for student housing at 23 Yeaman Place: following a presentation by the planning officer, as requested by a ward councillor, the planning committee at their recent meeting decided more detail and a site visit are needed. MCC was disappointed to receive notice of the meeting too late to attend.
The presentation suggested that daylight reduction on the opposite side of Yeaman Place would only affect commercial property and bathrooms, which is incorrect, as at least one of these properties whose living room would be overshadowed was converted to residential in 1998.
There are questions around the exact area of the site that can be developed and whether it should be a mixed development (if over 0.25 ha). MC also has concerns about the proposed ramped access from the canal. Also queries the amount of student housing in the area around this development – what qualifies as an area? – and the proposed high density of the development – a roof garden as proposed does not fulfil the same functions as green space.
VW: this has been deferred to a full hearing by CEC Planning Committee, giving time to muster arguments and attend the hearing. She will keep us informed.

**b.** The Boatel application is back for renewal

**c.** An application for conversion of Strathmore House, 4 Church Hill, to 6 flats was refused.

**5. Licensing Report**

BS, Licensing Lead:

a. 23 Yeaman Place: Dalton's Scrapyard licence renewal was refused by subcommittee of the licensing board due to complaints about noise, smoke and disturbance. Dalton's appeal will be heard at the Sheriff Court.
b. 3 new applications for alcohol licences in our area: an off-sales licence in Polwarth Crescent, Dundee Terrace and 51-55 Dundee Street. In each case no objection was submitted – MCC will be alert to complaints from residents if forthcoming.
c. BS has submitted a lengthy response to the consultation of the licensing policy review on behalf of MCC. This includes criticism of the new policy on noise, which is vague as to what constitutes an "audible nuisance" and a suggestion to limit the number of occasional licences granted, to better protect established businesses.

**6. Polwarth Pavements Improvement Project**

**RM and JMcK:**

165 completed survey forms with >800 statements were received and the first analysis carried out. More detail will be posted as it is obtained and a full presentation given at the February MCC meeting including analysis of the first tranche of traffic count data. A meeting with Police Scotland about the problems of the roundabout has been arranged and a link made to the City Mobility Plan.

High levels of concern (>80%) are reported about provision for pedestrians and cyclists, for problems of speeding, sightlines and heavy traffic. There were many suggestions for improvement (e.g. traffic lights, cycle lanes, removal of railings) but none achieve high levels of agreement.

On a typical week 25,700 vehicles travel northwards on this route, including >1,000 medium sized heavy good vehicles. Approx. half the vehicles on Merchiston Ave. exceed 25mph in the 20mph zone. Many accidents remain unreported.

Discussion: adding high density students housing on Yeaman Place will increase traffic and need for services, even if a car-free development.

BP offers help to obtain a speed survey.

VW mentions CEC's plans for pedestrian crossings here but not before 2024/5.

A suggestion was mentioned to make Viewforth bridge and Yeaman Place a one-way system, but possible displacement of traffic would be an issue.

**7. Merchiston Leaf Clearing Project (MCLP) Report** (appended)

**JH and HZ:**

Due to the bin strike in August /September, the MLCP was not up and running until the first week in October. A round 'robin letter' was sent to the 70 Volunteers from 2021 to inform them that it was being re-launched for 2022. By 14 October 38 deliveries of bags had been requested and delivered to the core Volunteers including 4 new Volunteers. By 16th October 221 filled bags had been uplifted.

One of the successes of the MLCP is that there is a community involvement when neighbours join, some meeting for the first time. Another is that because of the work that Merchiston Volunteers are doing collecting and bagging the leaves, CEC has undertaken to sweep and clear gutters using the small mechanical cleaner after leaf clearing – but feedback is that this is only being done in a few places and only occasionally.

On 4th December, a get-together was arranged to thank all who were involved in the MLCP 2022.

In future the possibility of using strong paper bags will be considered to reduce the use of plastic bags.

**In order that MCLP develops in future years, more help is required in the administration of the project.**

Discussion: ID: leaves not being composted by CEC is disappointing. BP will ask in more detail about this.

**8. Treasurer's Report**: (appended)

**FH:** MCC has >£5,700 in the account, following recent payments to a local foodbank, the leaf-clearing project get-together and a payment to Planning Aid for their part in the Pavements Project. FH asks if digitisation of the community council banking has been progressed by EACC and what EACC has decided about registering CCs for data protection purposes. ID: no further information from EACC about digital banking – he will pick that point up at the next meeting. EACC strongly recommends registering with the data protection office. EK: we need to review what data we hold and have some guidelines for dealing with data we hold or gather.

ID gives a reminder that a sizeable amount of MCC's money is earmarked for the Pavements Project.

**9. EACC Report:**

ID: EACC have set up a members' board to support the committee and ID is on this board.

EACC is struggling for financial resources. EACC will be submitting a formal request to CEC and the Edinburgh City Partnership for a small amount of funding to run the organisation. ID asks our councillors to support this as it saves CEC from liaising individually with all 46 CCs.

**10. City Councillors' Reports**. Scheduled Ward Councillor – Cllr Ben Parker

(All Ward 9 and Ward 10 City Councillors are invited to log in to all MCC public meetings)

BP:

a. A consultation on extending the 20-mph speed limit is currently live (https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/slowerspeeds/); CEC now produces a useful document detailing forthcoming consultations, which BP will ensure we receive. Coming up soon are consultations on Women's Safety, Gaelic Language Plan, Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy.
b. The Community Climate Fund is open for bids, focusing on "green" projects (link: https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/13630/edinburgh-community-climate-fund )
c. Trees at Napier University: BP is negotiating with Napier and will have a meeting, along with some residents, at the University to ask them about their responsibility for the trees. JH has also contacted the principal but not received a reply.

**11. Issues Raised by Residents**:

GB, Trustee of CHOISS (Cohousing Options in Southern Scotland https://choiss.org ) CHOISS is looking at a cohousing project on a nearby site (previously Phoenix Club on Harrison Gardens). MCC is invited to a meeting at the site on January 29th 1pm – 3pm. ***(This has since been moved to the North Merchiston Boys Club for reasons which include lack of space for a larger meeting - VK).*** In response to questions more details were given by GB and VK of what cohousing involves, see e.g. https://choiss.org/comiston-1 for an example of a previous project.

FL (FCCT) is supportive given the possibility of use of some of the space for community activities if this project is realised.

MCC members generally express support for the project and some may attend the meeting.

**12. Other Reports and Correspondence**

**JMcK:** Canal Festival planning meeting on 12th January was very well attended with many ideas for the festival on 17th June. More help is needed for marshalling, setting up etc. FCCT co-ordinates the whole festival and other organisations (e.g. Edinburgh Union Canal Society, EUCS) animate the different areas. BS will attend a meeting of EUCS about their involvement in the festival.

MCC stand will be situated near the EUCS boathouse and volunteers are needed to man the stall.

**13. Any Other Business:** none

***14.*** **Future Meetings**: *21st Feb (with an in-depth presentation and discussion about the Pavements Project), 21st March, 16th May, 20th June 2023.*

ID will ask Rachel Sedman from FCCT to give a presentation at a forthcoming meeting.

Merchiston Community Council

# Chair's Report – January 2023

1. **Merchiston Community Council (MCC) starts the new year with optimism, a strong team of members, and is developing a programme of community activities for the year ahead.**

   MCC is a statutory community council for Merchiston, Bruntsfield, Viewforth, Greenhill and Shandon. MCC has a statutory right to submit comments (positive or negative) to CEC on local planning applications in our area. MCC also monitors alcohol and other licences, reviews public services, environmental and transport issues, public amenities, public safety, and policing issues. MCC holds regular public meetings that are open to residents, in which we review community issues. MCC organises a range of community projects, including our successful Leaf Clearing scheme and the current Polwarth Pavements Improvement Project.

   MCC seeks to resolve issues of concern in our community, considers complaints, and makes recommendations to improve local services and amenities. City Councillors participate in MCC meetings and provide update information on community issues, answer questions, and consider complaints and recommendations.

   MCC comprises a team of active volunteers who represent the public, speak up for community interests and seek to improve our community as a pleasant place to live and work.

2. **Leaf Clearing Project Thank You Event.** MCC organised a reception on 4th December to thank the volunteers who participated in clearing leaves, and to celebrate the success of the project**.** The event took place in Polwarth Church Hall and around 25 people attended, including volunteers, MCC members, and several City Councillors. Prizes were awarded to several "top performers" to recognise that they had contributed exceptionally by clearing beyond their own houses and cleared other areas where leaves and blocked drains were a problem. Thanks were also expressed to the organisers of the Leaf Clearing Project, Helen Zealley and Joan Houston.

3. **Bruntsfield Shops.** It was good to see over the festive period that many independent local shops and restaurants were very busy and did good business. Several shop owners I spoke to said that business had been good and that many people were choosing to shop locally, rather than travelling into the city centre.

   Shopping in suburban areas such as Bruntsfield and Morningside appear to be benefitting from changes in residents' shopping preferences. Many people no longer find it attractive to go into the city centre as much as they used to. Various negative factors are mentioned that have made the city centre less attractive, including several department stores have closed down, depressing vistas of numerous closed

premises, litter, roadworks, traffic congestion and exhaust fumes, extreme difficulty in finding parking in city centre and very expensive parking fees.

Another negative factor that I hear residents mentioned is that the city centre is suffering from being "swamped" by an over-focus on commercial tourist activities all year round, plus limited choice in city centre shops compared with on-line shopping, better customer service at specialist independent local shops, tatty souvenir shops and tacky fast-food outlets generating excessive litter and unpleasant food smells.

Alexander McCall Smith warned five years ago that Edinburgh tourism is *"turning the capital into a vulgar wasteland"* if the City Council does not limit commercial interests, and feared that Edinburgh will become *"tourist tat shops, big hotels and nothing much else"* if tourism is not kept under control.

4. **City Council Finances** – Financial pressures on Edinburgh City Council are becoming increasingly difficult. The independent Accounts Commission recently stated that all local authorities are facing "*unprecedented difficult choices*", are having to limit the services they can provide and to prioritise, and that the financial situation of all councils is described as "*increasingly fragile*".

   Edinburgh City Council claims that, in recent years, it has suffered damaging "real terms" reductions in the value of government grants and government limitations on council tax increases, the result of which is that the City's income base now falls far short of the funding required to provide adequate local services. A further negative factor is that councils are being squeezed by increased costs caused by inflation, plus income losses through increasing arrears of council tax income.

   Councils currently have very limited scope to increase their finances, mainly because only 20% of council income currently comes from local council tax. One consequence is that a substantial increase in council tax and increased charges for council services is highly likely; However, because of the "gearing effect" of 80% of CEC income depending directly on cash-limited grants from Scottish Government, even with increases in council tax and service charges, this will not be sufficient to restore council finances and local services to their previous level.

   The result of financial pressures is that local services are likely to deteriorate further because councils have sufficient money to maintain desirable service levels. There is a growing pressure to prioritise front-line services, particularly social care, education, housing, and alleviation of poverty, but as a result other council services will be starved of cash. Further evidence of stretched CEC resources are apparent in reduced community services, deteriorating road surfaces, uncleared street drains and lack of other maintenance.

   There will undoubtedly also be very difficult "prioritisation" decision CEC will have to take about future grants to voluntary, charitable and arts organisations, and availability of scarce resources to support community services.

5. **Cost Of Living Crisis**. Overall, our community faces numerous problems which are likely to present long-lasting difficulties, including severe pressures on NHS and financial constraints on all public services. One of the most all-pervasive problems is the increased cost of living, with high rate of inflation (hovering around 10%) and risk of an economic recession resulting in sustainability risks to businesses and jobs.

   An insidious effect of high inflation is the erosion of all forms of income and savings, which means people have less spending power in real terms; even if they receive modest cost-of-living pay awards, many are worse off. Increased cost of basics, particularly food and increased energy costs, means that people are having to make difficult financial choices and people's income and savings are being eroded as they strive to pay for the range of activities that they previously carried out.

6. **Deposit Return Scheme** – Scottish Government intends to introduce a controversial new Deposit Return Scheme. https://www.gov.scot/news/scotlands-deposit-return-scheme/

   People will pay a 20p deposit when they buy a drink that comes in a single-use container made of PET plastic, steel and aluminium, or glass. They will get their money back if/when they return the empty container to one of [intended] *"tens of thousands of return points*". Intended benefits claimed include: "- *reduced carbon emissions, more and better recycling, and the removal of up to one third of the litter from our streets*". Drinks producers, supermarkets and shops are being urged to register to participate – however, many shops are reluctant to get geared up because of misgivings about costs of operating the scheme.

   There is a risk that the Deposit Return Scheme may lead to "unintended consequences": Several local authorities are reported to be reviewing whether they should discontinue providing kerbside bottles and cans collection services in light of the Deposit Return Scheme. This would pose difficulties for many households, especially those who are unable to transport bottles and cans to a registered deposit return shop - which may be some distance away and/or have unsuitable hours - to obtain a small refund. There appear to be numerous logistics and "willingness to participate" issues still to be resolved!

7. **Chair's Meetings:**
   - 17th November - Cockburn Annual Lecture: "Edinburgh's Common Good Fund"
   - 24th November - EACC AGM + Business Meeting
   - 4th December – Leaf Clearing Project Thank You Event
   - 5th December – SW Community Grants Funding Panel
   - 12th December – MCC Members Internal Meeting
   - 22nd December - EACC Members' Board Meeting
   - 5th January - EACC Members' Board Meeting
   - 7th January – MCC Members New Year Social Event
   - 9th January - MCC Members Internal Meeting.
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   Ian Doig. Merchiston CC Chair. January 2023.

# Merchiston Leaf Clearing Project 2022 (MLCP)

## Comments

1. Due to the Bin Strike in August /September, the Merchiston Leaf Clearing Project (MLCP) was not up and running until the first week in October.
2. A round 'robin letter' was sent to the 70 Volunteers from 2021 to inform them that the MLCP was being re-launched for 2022. By 14 October 38 deliveries of bags had been requested and delivered to the core Volunteers including 4 new Volunteers.
3. We have not altered the administration process:
    a. **Helen Zealley** — liaises with the Volunteers in two ways: using the email merchistonleafclearing@gmail.com (i) to report the exact position of filled bags ready for collection and (ii) to request delivery of new bags.
    b. **Joan Houston** — liaises with the City of Edinburgh Recycling for (i) the delivery of new bags (ii) pick-up sites of filled bags (iii) delivery of new equipment- brushes, bags, litter picker, gloves, etc. using the emails for Liam Bain and Neil Gilmour. Liam and Neil work a 4-week shift rota. Hence both emails are used so that the message can be processed.

    Liam Bain - liam.bain@edinburgh.gov.uk
    Neil Gilmour neil.gilmour@edinburgh.gov.uk

4. One of the successes of the MLCP is that there is community involvement when neighbours join, some meeting for the first time. We are aware that 7 people have linked with core volunteers to form a Clearing Group.
5. Because of the work that Merchiston Volunteers are doing – collecting and bagging the leaves, the Council has undertaken to sweep and clear gutters using the small mechanical cleaner after leaf clearing. This is very gratifying as 'Mr Public' can then see that leaf clearing has been done.
6. Blocked drains, especially in Polwarth Terrace are reported to the Council as the MLCP progresses.
7. On 4th December, a get-together to thank all who were involved in the MLCP 2022. This was another way to get neighbours meeting other like-minded folks. Prizes were given to the 'top' leaf clearer, a husband-and-wife team for 'best leaf clearers out with their immediate property'.
8. Due to the late start of the MLCP, we did not get help from the George Watson's College pupils, but GWC grounds staff cleared the leaves at the perimeter of their campus on Colinton Road and Tipperlinn Road.
9. By 16th October 221 filled bags had been uplifted.
10. There were more female Volunteers.

## The way forward for 2024

1. Contact with GWC to be made earlier in June with the Co-ordinator of the Duke of Edinburgh Award
2. A3 Poster – year to be altered and distributed in September to local shops, churches etc
3. As darkness falls it is difficult to see house numbers. Both project coordinators require contact phone numbers and addresses with house numbers.
4. Contamination collecting bags require to be of a different colour, be more sturdy and easier to handle. Helen has an example of a strong paper bag which is used in the USA
5. Emphasise is required that all collected bags are reported to the MLCP email as we were made aware of a number of bags being picked up before they had been reported.
6. A number of households use the filled bags for compost in their own gardens and so are not recorded in the overall numbers.
7. Data protection process – a new hand-out has to be issued to each Volunteer in line with Data Protection laws.

In order that the MLCP develops in future years, more help is required in the administration of the project.

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Helen Zealley and Joan M. Houston (Coordinators)

14th January 2023

**Merchiston Community Council 2022-23 Cash Flow**
**#**

| Date | Description | Chq no. | Entry | ££ | Balance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 Apr 22 | Carried forward | | | | £7436.65 |
| 01 Apr | FoMBL (SO) | | | £50.00 | £7386.65 |
| 12 Apr | Donation to EACC | **42** | 01 | £50.00 | £7336.65 |
| 01 May | Keegan&Pennykid (DirDeb) | | 02 | £82.54 | £7254.11 |
| 24 May | Website (refd. EK) | **44** | 03 | £97.49 | £7156.62 |
| 09 Aug | Auditor's fee | **45** | 04 | £30.00 | £7126.62 |
| 09 Aug | Publicity (refd. VK) | **46** | 05 | £226.95 | £6899.67 |
| 19 Aug | CEC annual grant | | | £1004.70CR | £7904.37 |
| 26 Aug | Bench (Janie Morris) | 47 | 06 | £949.84CNX | £7904.37 |
| 28 Aug | Bench (plaque: refd. BS) | **48** | 07 | £52.00 | £7852.37 |
| 13 Sep | Bench (replmt for chq no.47) | **49** | | £949.84 | £6902.53 |
| 04 Oct | Zoom meetings (refd. DM) | 52 | 08 | £86.34 | £6816.19 |
| 15 Nov | Polwarth Pvts. (refd. RM) | **53** | 09 | £293.00 | £6523.19 |
| 17 Dec | Donation to BEC foodbank:1 | **54** | 10 | £50.00 | £6473.19 |
| 06 Jan 23 | Leaf clrng gathrng (refd. HZ) | 56 | 11 | £142.88 | £6330.31 |
| 13 Jan | Polwarth Pvts. (PAS) | 58 | 12 | £510.00 | £5820.31 |
| 17 Jan | Donation to BEC foodbank:2 | 59 | 10 | £50.00 | £5770.31 |

Cheque numbers in bold print have been paid.
Note: cheque nos. 43, 50, 51, 55 cancelled owing to orthographic error (unfortunately writing a cheque is a completely alien concept to my young PAs!)

: cheque no. 47 cancelled for BoS technical glitch – see letter on file dated 7 Sep 2022

: cheque no. 57 cancelled because of misunderstanding as to who the payee ought to be – see relevant e-mails on file