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

Date: 21 March 2023

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

Started: 19:00.
Ended: 21.10

Present:

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

Councillor Marie-Claire Munro (MCM, Scottish Conservative).

Residents: Morag Jones (MJ), Roy Kilpatrick (RK)

ID welcomed Rachel Sedman, Development Manager, Fountainbridge Canalside Community Development Trust (FCCT), who gave a presentation on FCCT's recent achievements, current activities and goals for the medium term. The meeting noted with interest FCCT's role in facilitating links amongst a wide range of community organisations in the neighbourhood; and its work to sustain and improve mental health and employability.

The presentation prompted discussion of the major new housing development at Fountainbridge (south side). Members expressed their disappointment and disquiet over various aspects of the new scheme, especially in relation to the provision of public open space and housing density. Abundant graffiti along and near the canal threatened the amenity of the whole area; there was no evidence of action on the part of Scottish Canals to address the issue. MCM undertook to raise the matter with the community police officer for the area. JMK contrasted the efforts and achievements of Edinburgh and Birmingham in creating vibrant and attractive canalside neighbourhoods. Unless public amenity issues were grasped soon, the prospects for the area were doubtful.

Business Meeting

Agenda items 1-3. ID welcomed residents to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Helen Zealley. There were no declarations of interest. The minutes of the meeting held on 21 February were agreed as an accurate record and approved, subject to one minor adjustment to note the current Scottish Government consultations (closing 2 April 2023) on the extension of 'essential users' parking permits' to cover personal carers. There were no

matters arising not already on the agenda. The Chair's report (attached to this) was noted. Details of the CEC budget for 2023-24 had not yet been finalised.

4. Planning Report — MC

MC had attended and spoken at the recent hearing to determine the planning application for the site at 23 Yeaman Place, which envisaged a high-density development of student housing. Representations against the proposals were also made by several Ward Councillors. In MC's view, the issues affecting neighbours in adjacent tenements were not given thorough consideration, nor did they weigh heavily in the final decision to grant the application. The Committee seemed overly influenced by the prospect – held out by the developers in their revised proposals – of direct and DDA-compliant (Disability Discrimination Act 1995) access to the canal from Yeaman Place, even though this feature could be secured by conditions applied to any development of the site. MC reported that Novel would be the operators of the site (as they are of the block on Dundee Street). The fire service had not apparently been consulted on the feasibility of engine access from Yeaman Place.

A central issue emerging from this application was the '50% threshold' applied by CEC and designed to avoid excessive concentration of student housing in any one neighbourhood. But the extent of the relevant 'neighbourhood' had not been defined by CEC nor was it consistently applied. As such, it was in MC's view an unworkable and capricious criterion.

MC also expressed concern over the risk of anti-social behaviour in the 'pend' proposed to lead from Yeaman Place to the Canal. Under the proposals, this would be supervised and lit at all times, but experience elsewhere suggested that this passage way could well become a magnet for bad behaviour.

MC also reported on 36-38 Yeaman Place, which was previously the subject of an application for development as a café/ pizzeria. The owner has now submitted a second application to convert the property into two flats: this is awaiting assessment. MC assumed that the second proposal had been entered as a fallback, in case the first is refused (again).

5. Licensing Report BS

Two applications, in respect of which MCC's line to take had been agreed at the last meeting, had now been determined by the Licensing Board. They relate to premises at 9 Dundee Terrace & 14 Polwarth Crescent. A third application, relating to 155 Dundee Street (St Food & Wines), would be considered on 27 March (MCC's line being the same for this as the other two). An application relating to a unit within Fountainpark – the 'Funstation' – had been postponed until April. BS proposed that MCC's line remain one of neutrality – we would offer no objection but reserve the right to revert to the Licensing Committee should residents report any disturbance from the premises.

On Dalton's scrapyard, the position was that the appeal lodged by Dalton's - against CEC's refusal to extend the scrapyard permit - was 'making its way through the [sheriff court] process'. One procedural hearing had taken place on 7 March; another would take place on 20 April. It was not possible to say when we might expect the substantive decision. Meantime, Dalton's was entitled to continue operating.

6. Polwarth Pavements: Roundabout

RM & JMK confirmed that the draft report was now with Councillors, stakeholders and residents. Comments were invited. Council officers would shortly be engaged. The initial response was favourable. A small street event would be held on Saturday 25 March to publicise the draft report. The meeting noted that in a project such as this -proposing multiple changes to road layout and amenity provision – it was impossible to please everyone. There were competing interests. It was key that the community itself took ownership of the proposals, since they would have to live with the outcomes.

7. Treasurer's Report: FH

A cash flow paper and a spreadsheet report had been circulated in advance. The financial position was healthy, with a surplus showing for the end of the financial year. FH asked all members who had incurred agreed expenses to lodge payment cheques at banks before 04 April 2023. Audited accounts would be needed for MCC's AGM in June. RM hoped CEC would allow MCC to retain the projected underspend on the Polwarth Pavement project, which reflected lower than expected consultants' fees.

8. City Councillor Report: MCM

MCM agreed to send a detailed report in hard copy on the Bin Hubs project and the Deposit Return Scheme.

9. Issues raised by residents

RK raised the matter of the felling of two mature trees in the front garden of 18 Polwarth Terrace. The justification for felling seemed poor: storm damage to these trees had been slight; and the boundary wall – only knee-high – did not show any significant bulging or movement. Indeed, the wall had been sound enough for the owners recently to attach a handsome cast-iron railing. RK was worried about the progressive loss of mature trees in the neighbourhood: this was the third property on the Terrace without trees in the front garden. Given the area's conservation status, he felt that the offered justification should have been tested, at least through a site visit; and that, if evidence of disease or damage were proven, the owners should be compelled to plant replacement trees. These however would not compare to the ones felled in terms of carbon capture or amenity. MCC **decided** to take this matter further, inviting MJ to supply photographs of the felling and making further enquiries through the CEC planning portal. Members expressed disquiet that trees might have been felled without compelling justification. It would be important to discover whether CEC procedures involved site visits to a sample of applications in sensitive areas.

Action Point – ID invited MC as Planning Lead to draft a letter on behalf of MCC to CEC to ask for details of the trees assessment CEC had made for this case, and the reasons for CEC's approval to fell the two mature and healthy trees in this Conservation Area.

10. Other Reports

ID noted that the City Plan was now being examined by Scottish Ministers. The Edinburgh Union Canal Society was planning a number of future events, including a re-launch of rowing boats on 16 April. JH had again written to Cllr Ross about school parking on S. Ettrick Rd.

There was no other business under item **11** and future meeting dates were confirmed as on the agenda already circulated. The meeting closed at 21.10.

Merchiston Community Council

Chair's Report – March 2023

1. **City Council Finances –** City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) recently decided its budget for the forthcoming financial year 2023-24. (Information below supplied to MCC by Cllr Neil Ross)

    - Council Tax will increase by 5%. Council Taxpayers will pay for 2023-24:
      Band A £965.13
      Band B 1,125.98
      Band C 1,286.84
      Band D £1,447.69
      Band E £1,902.10
      Band F £2,352.50
      Band G £2,835.06
      Band H £3,546.84

    Other CEC Budget Decisions:

    - £11m more allocated for roads, pavements, and paths
    - £3m more for street sweeping, gully cleaning, fly tipping and graffiti removal.
    - More money to tackle climate change measures, including £2m for flood prevention.
    - £3m for improvements to parks and greenspaces.
    - £3m towards Kings Theatre refurbishment costs.
    - School budgets protected by rejecting proposed cuts of £5.5m to schools' budgets.
    - Increase in parking penalties to £50/£100.
    - Further report to be submitted to seek approval of revised charges for Council services.
    - Save £600k by withdrawing commitment to no compulsory redundancies.
    - Other issues considered include: *"Generate significant savings from Best Value service reviews, specifically looking at external provision of Waste & Cleansing Services, which may result in savings of £500k in year 1, rising to £2.5m p.a. in subsequent years*". (This proposal is controversial. Unclear to me whether the full Council has committed itself to consider "external provision" of Waste and Cleansing Services, and in what manner and when a service review will take place).

2. **EACC Report -** Recent EACC activities and meetings include**:**
    - Funding grant for £1,850 to EACC has been agreed by the Edinburgh Partnership Board and CEC. This will enable EACC to continue to operate, albeit on a shoestring basis by meeting website and basic operating costs.

- EACC Business Meeting 23rd February featured presentations on CEC Roads Strategy and Maintenance by Cliff Hutt, Head of Roads and Infrastructure, and Gavin Brown, Head of Network Management and Enforcement.
- EACC intends to set up mutual support Planning Leads Network and Licencing Leads Network across Edinburgh's CCs to share experience and information. MCC's Planning Lead, Marianna Clyde, and Licencing Lead, Bridget Stevens have kindly agreed to join the respective networks.
- CEC has requested EACC to assist "fragile" community councils, especially areas which do not have an active community council or are struggling with too few members to operate effectively.
- EACC is placing strong store in the forthcoming CEC Community Empowerment and Engagement Initiative, which is being led by Andrew Field, Head of Community Empowerment and Engagement, and his team.
- CEC Bin Hubs – Dismay expressed by some CCs about CEC Bin Hub siting policy and apparent reluctance to engage in local "consultation". Unclear whether CEC wider consultation exercise on Bin Hubs is still current or has closed.
- "Transition Edinburgh: Clean Heat Edinburgh" event took place on 15th March. Presentation material should be available in due course. Key issue with "district heating" appears to be absence as yet of a strategic framework by CEC which would allow households/local communities to take informed decisions.
- Next full EACC Business Meeting (online Teams meeting) on 30th March will feature presentations by Cllr Mandy Watt, Convener of CEC's Finance and Resources Committee. Also, presentation by CEC's Angus Murdoch, Neighbourhood Environment Services – *"Doing the dirty work: empty, clean, recycle, repeat".*
- EACC website for further information: http://www.edinburghcommunitycouncils.org.uk

3. **Polwarth Pavements Improvement Project** – This ambitious project is producing significant findings and recommendations that are still evolving. A huge amount work by way of public consultation, traffic analysis, Police Scotland involvement, liaison with CEC and with local businesses, and report writing has already been done, and continues to be done, by Roma Menlowe and John McKenna, both MCC members.

   A draft report has recently been circulated to a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, MCC members and CEC Ward Councillors. Comments on the draft report are being invited for further consideration.

   An update on the latest developments in this project will be discussed in MCC's next public meeting on 21st March, including next steps and recommendations towards an action plan to improve public safety and environmental improvements at the Polwarth roundabout, which residents have described as "dangerous".

4. **Edinburgh Bookshop, Bruntsfield** – Congratulations to The Edinburgh Bookshop in Bruntsfield for again winning the prestigious *"Independent Bookshop of the Year Award"* for coming top bookshop in Scotland. This is the fifth time The Edinburgh Bookshop has won this award since it opened 10 years ago, in addition to previously winning the Children's Bookseller of the Year Trophy.

5. Chair's Meetings:

- 23rd February - EACC Members' Board Meeting
- 28th February - SW Locality Community Planning Partnership
- 2nd March - EACC Members' Board Meeting
- 9th March - SW Community Grants Funding Panel
- 13th March - MCC Members Internal Meeting
- 16th March – EACC Members' Board Meeting
- 21st March – MCC Public Meeting

Ian Doig. Merchiston CC Chair. March 2023.