Merchiston Community Council

Minutes of Public Meeting of Merchiston Community Council
Tuesday 21st February 2023 at 19.00 by Zoom

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

Started: 19:00
Ended: 21:00

Attending:

MCC members: Ian Doig (ID, *Chair)*, Vivien Kitteringham (VK, *Vice-Chair)*, Frances Hawarden (FH, *Treasurer)*, Roma Menlowe (RM*)*, Bridget Stevens (BS), Joan Houston (JH), Ewan Klein (EK, *Minutes*), John McKenna (JMcK).

CEC Ward Councillors: Cllr Val Walker (VW, Ward 9), Cllr Marie-Clair Munro (MCM, Ward 10)

Residents: Guy Chisholm, David Leslie, Mary Breatnach, Henry Chow

Apologies: Helen Zealley, Mairianna Clyde, Cllr David Key, Daniel Johnson MSP
Welcome (ID)

Presentation: *Polwarth Pavement Project — Progress Report*
Roma Menlowe and John McKenna, Project Leaders and MCC Members

Points raised in discussion covered short-term vs longer-term modifications to the roundabout; looking for funding sources apart from CEC; and related issues about traffic speeding along Merchiston Avenue.

A detailed report of the project is currently being developed and will be widely circulated. Regular updates on the project will be made available on the dedicated page of the MCC website (which also contains contact information):
https://merchistoncc.org.uk/projects/the-polwarth-pavement-project/
The slides are available in the associated file.

BUSINESS MEETING

1. **Introduction - Ian Doig, MCC Chair**

   Apologies for Absence:
   MCC: Mairianna Clyde, Helen Zealley
   CEC Councillors: David Key,
   Daniel Johnson MSP

   Declarations of Interest None declared

2. **Minutes of Public Meeting of 17th January —** Approved
   Matters Arising — None

3. **Chair's Report** (appended) — ID summarised his report.
   BS mentioned that Lawrence Marshall has been working for a long time on reopening the Edinburgh South Suburban Railway Line and had set up a group called the Capital Rail Action Group; he might be a useful contact.

4. **Licensing Report**— BS, Licensing Lead
   BS reported that of the three current applications, two (*Taste of Delhi* at 14 Polwarth Crescent and *Guru Balti* at 9 Dundee Terrace) would be going before the Licensing Board on 27/2/23. MCC had declared that they had no reason to oppose these applications — provided that, if they were granted, no disturbance followed. The other application which had also been discussed at MCC's last meeting, relating to *ST Food & Wine Off Licence* at 155 Dundee Street, had not yet been scheduled for consideration by the Licensing Board. It involved a new layout of the building and BS had asked to see a copy of the plans.

   BS reported that there has been a new application from a business in Fountain Park called Fun Station Ltd for an amendment of its current license to allow for new types of event within the building. It was **agreed** that BS should respond to say that MCC has no objections at present but if we hear of any disturbance or any upset caused to local residents, we reserve the right to get back to the Council and ask for a review of the license.

   Dalton's Scrap Yard: Peter Dalton had appealed against the official decision not to renew his licence and a formal process was underway between him and the City of Edinburgh Council Licensing Section. MCC, as a principal Objector to the renewal, had been formally contacted by Mr Dalton's Solicitor and BS was in discussion with them to ensure that they understood fully the role and responsibilities of community councils. The Hearing had been scheduled to take place at Edinburgh Sheriff Court on 7/2/23 but had been continued to 7/3/23 "in order that the merit of the appeal could be given more detailed consideration". BS is in contact with Nick Fraser, Depute Clerk of the CEC Licensing Board, about the progress of the Appeal and MCC's place in it.

5. **Planning Report** — MC, Planning Lead
   MC was unable to attend in person but provided the following written report:
   (1) An MCC objection has been submitted to the proposed short-term let in Fowler Terrace.
   (2) The owner of the former car parts shop at Walker Bridge, 36-38 Yeaman Place, has submitted another application, namely to change the use from commercial to residential. He now proposes converting it into two flats. It would seem he has given up on the plans for a cafe but since the cafe plans have not been withdrawn and are yet to be determined this may be simply a fallback option.
   (3) 23 Yeaman Place, student housing. (22/03556/FUL). The Head of Planning David Given has recommended this be granted but the planning committee has asked for a site visit (22nd February) and hearing (15th March), to which MCC has been invited.

   VK pointed out that if the proposal in (2) proceeded, then it might support objections to (3) on the grounds of overlooking residential property.

6. **Treasurer's Report** (appended) — FH

7. **City Councillors' Reports**. The Scheduled Councillor, Cllr Mandy Watt, was unable to attend but Cllrs Val Walker and Marie-Clair Munro both gave a brief overview of current

developments, particularly the budget negotiations. Because of a large spending deficit and limitations on borrowing, there will be increases in Council Tax, car parking fines, and possibly the cost of parking permits. As far as possible, spending on education will be protected and there is also a recognition of the cultural importance of Kings Theatre.

FH asked for an update on progress towards the CEC providing free parking for caregivers, who often rely on their cars for providing care. MCM responded that she understood the need but was concerned that it would be complex to design a suitable solution and difficult to implement.

8. **Issues Raised by Residents**
   DL noted that as yet, he has not seen any record of MCC discussion of developments of the old Phoenix building and associated site. He believes that the site owner is expecting a couple of outline proposals from potential purchasers to be submitted by 27th February. VK confirmed that one of these bids will be from the organisation Cohousing Options in Southern Scotland (https://choiss.org), of which she is a member. In the meantime, members of Grove Community Garden are gardening on the site and expect to be there for at least the rest of the year.

9. **Other Reports and Correspondence**
   a. ID reported that Raina Bergasse has resigned from MCC due to pressure from other commitments. Together with other changes, there are now several vacancies for members — given all the activities currently underway, MCC definitely needs more support.
   b. VK reported that the new noticeboard has now been installed outside Margiottas on the corner of Ashley Terrace and Harrison Gardens. It was **agreed** that she could offer a small sum of around £20 from MCC funds as a token of gratitude to the people who had helped put the noticeboard up.

10. **Any Other Business** — none

11. **Future Public Meetings**: 21st March, 16th May, 20th June 2023.
    The next meeting, on Tuesday, 21st March will start with a presentation from Rachel Sedman about Fountain Bridge Canalside Community Trust.

Merchiston Community Council

Chair's Report – February 2023

1. **Overview** - My activities as Chair of Merchiston Community Council (MCC) are increasing as a result of my representing MCC on other organisations as the representative of MCC, including:

   - Edinburgh Association of Community Councils (EACC) – report below
   - SW Edinburgh Locality Community Planning Partnership (LCCPP)
   - SW Edinburgh Community Grants Funding Panel – Chair of Funding Panel

2. **EACC Report -** EACC is increasingly active as a forum for discussion of issues that affect community councils across Edinburgh, including issues of common concern and reviewing relationships with various public service organisations. EACC activities include interactive online discussion meetings between community councils and with public services organisations, including City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) and NHS.

   Recent EACC meetings include**:**
   - ***Community Partnership Planning*** - Andrew Field; CEC Head of Community Empowerment and Engagement.

     Objectives of CEC new Community Empowerment and Engagement policy are:
   - Working with Community Councils, Neighbourhood Networks and Local Community Planning Partnerships
   - Meaningful access for city residents to cultural opportunities
   - Edinburgh a welcoming city to cultural practitioners
   - Edinburgh an environmentally responsible cultural city.

     Andrew Field's is a new role and includes providing a service to all CCs by acting as a "single point of contact' to minimise CC's complaints of difficulties in locating the appropriate person within CEC for information, requesting action and registering complaints.

     Ongoing staff review throughout CEC means that staff are having to apply for their own jobs, and many staff are being redeployed into different roles, or may leave.

     Participatory Budgeting is being encouraged by CEC. A pilot has been successful in Leith but less successful elsewhere in Edinburgh. Tried by SW Community Grants Funding Panel, but without much success. Downsides included it did not generate much participation by the public (possibly because SW comprises several different communities and is less one-community than Leith? A further problem is Participatory Budgeting requires a lot of additional admin work, for which staff resources are lacking.

- ***Transport Priorities for a Growing City*** - Cllr Scott Arthur, Convenor of CEC Transport and Environment Committee.

  Context of Presentation:
- "37, 000 new homes are planned for Edinburgh by 2030.
- Edinburgh is "the most congested city in the UK".
- 20-Minute Neighbourhoods - a central platform to transport and environmental planning.
- Huge (chronic) funding pressure on councils; effectively a permanent backdrop. Threatens regional and city economic development.
- And then there are potholes – a scourge, but one not unique to Edinburgh!"

  Cllr Arthur explained the proposed new transport strategy for CEC, which will involve considerable investment. Proposed improvements include improved and integrated public transport; cycle lanes; more tram lines; and 20-minute neighbourhood communities.

  I advocated reopening the Edinburgh South Suburban Railway Line for passenger services, possibly using Tram/Trains. Line is currently in use but only for freight and empty rolling stock traffic to take pressure off Haymarket and Waverley stations). Cllr Arthur responded that he was supportive and optimistic this could be done; however, funding a reopening for passenger services would require considerable investment and funding would be the responsibility of Network Rail and Scotrail, not CEC.

  Complaints by several community councils about the dreadful condition of roads and pavements throughout Edinburgh, and complaints of ineffectual repairs to potholes, which break up very quickly; Cllr Arthur blamed roads contactors for poor repairs and said CEC was introducing tighter control of contractors and more lasting repairs systems for potholes and road defects.

  Complaints also by CCs about excessive disruption caused by contactors digging up roads and pavement and then leave disruption unfinished for ages. It was suggested that CEC should impose strict time limits and fines on contractors if disruption goes beyond a reasonable time. Cllr Arthur accepted that complaints about contactors causing excessive disruption to residents were valid (City Fibre mentioned specifically) and offered to follow up to see what could be done to exercise greater regulatory control over contractor to minimise disruption.

  EACC has submitted a funding request to CEC of around £1,800 to enable EACC to continue to operate, since EACC has no other income. CEC is expected to decide on funding soon.

3. **Outdoor Seating Legislation** – Press reports indicate that Scottish Government is reducing restrictions to give greater freedom for outdoor eating and drinking.

Press reports state that these changes are intended to: "*Rejuvenate struggling high streets and support the hospitality sector. From March 2023, food and drink outlets will be able to place tables and chairs on pavements outside their premises without submitting a planning application".*

Councils will however still have powers to clamp down on pavement arrangements that impinge on public safety, including for those who are visually impaired and obstructions that make it difficult for anyone with a pram or buggy or wheelchair users to get along the pavement.

It is also reported that changes will also include a relaxation of planning rules for the conversion of some premises into cafes, restaurants, or small offices, and make the installation of large-scale electrical vehicle charging equipment in car parks easier.

How City of Edinburgh Council will react to these changes – and the possible unintended consequences of obstructing pavements - remains to be seen. MCC would welcome information from our City Councillors as these changes are implemented.

4. **City Council Finances** – Financial pressures on City of Edinburgh Council are becoming increasingly difficult. CEC faces a substantial multi-million-pound projected deficit for 2023-24, for which a range of difficult cost-cutting measures are being considered.

   CEC is required by statute to set its budget and Council Tax levels for financial year 2023-24 in the next few weeks. Final budget decisions have not yet emerged, but difficult options are being considered to prioritise essential services and reduce costs. Consequently, it is likely there will be a substantial increase in Council Tax, plus an increase in Scottish Water charges (billed with Council Tax but a separate charge), increases in charges for CEC services, possible reductions in leisure and other "non-essential" facilities, reductions in many service levels, reductions in staff numbers, and automated internet services replacing staffed services.

   MCC requests that our City Councillors will keep our community council and residents updated on CEC budget decisions and tax levels as decisions firm up.

   An interesting letter in the press recently by a resident suggested that CEC should make several changes to ease pressure on local services:
   - Tourist Tax to raise additional revenue. A small charge of say £3 per night would raise around £25million annually and would be marginal to tourists' costs. Tourists generate additional rubbish collection and disposal costs for CEC.
   - Admission charges on CEC museums, galleries, and increases for other facilities.
   - Increase Council Tax rates for higher-band houses in bands F, G and H.

   I agree with his first two suggestions – but strongly dispute the third suggestion of increased rates for higher-band houses. The writer confuses the capital value of a

property with what he called "the *likely income of the residents*". He fails to differentiate between capital value of a house ("illiquid" value) and the current income of residents. Some residents may be "*asset rich but cash poor*", such as those living in large properties that they may have inherited or purchased when they were in full-time employment, but now have a modest income from pensions or savings.

The correspondent also recommends switching to Local Income Tax (LIT) rather than the Council Tax. Council Tax is not perfect and could be improved, such as revaluation of properties. However, many objective appraisals, including the definitive Layfield Commission, identified fundamental technical deficiencies in Local Income Tax as a sole basis for funding local government services – this is one of the reasons 80% of local government is funded by Scottish Government grants. Local Income Tax has several weaknesses when assessed against the principles of taxation, including that taxes should provide a precise and predictable income base to fund public services (LIT would be too volatile each year to be precisely predictable as a tax base). LIT, like Income Tax, would be easier to evade than a property-based tax - properties are difficult to conceal! Another problem is the subjective issue of "fairness"; in moving to LIT, there would be huge numbers of "winners and losers", which would cause argument about "fairness", dissent, and political uproar – echoes of the Poll Tax?

5. **Chair's Meetings:**
   - 19th January - EACC Members' Board Meeting
   - 26th January – EACC Business Meeting
   - 2nd February - EACC Members' Board Meeting
   - 9th February – EACC Online Meeting
   - 13th February - MCC Members Internal Meeting
   - 16th February - EACC Members' Board Meeting
   - 21st February – MCC Public Meeting

Ian Doig. Merchiston CC Chair. February 2023.

Merchiston Community Council Cash Flow 2022-23

Summary

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Year's Total
Opening cash on hand	**£7,436.65**	£7,336.65	£7,156.62	£7,156.62	£7,156.62	£7,852.37	£6,902.53	£6,816.19	£6,523.19	£6,473.19	£5,422.75	£5,114.43	£7,436.65
Total income	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,004.70	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,004.70
Total expenditures	£100.00	£180.03	£0.00	£0.00	£308.95	£949.84	£86.34	£293.00	£50.00	£1,050.44	£308.32	£0.00	£3,326.92
Net cash flow	-£100.00	-£180.03	£0.00	£0.00	£695.75	-£949.84	-£86.34	-£293.00	-£50.00	-£1,050.44	-£308.32	£0.00	-£2,322.22
Ending balance	£7,336.65	£7,156.62	£7,156.62	£7,156.62	£7,852.37	£6,902.53	£6,816.19	£6,523.19	£6,473.19	£5,422.75	£5,114.43	£5,114.43	£5,114.43

Note:
In order for the Works functions in this template to work properly, you must enter information into at least one of the cells outlined in red.

Income

CEC Grant					£1,004.70								£1,004.70
Misc Grant													£0.00
Bank Int													£0.00
Financial aid													£0.00
Other income													£0.00

Expenditures

Chair's expenses													£0.00
Secretary's expenses													£0.00
Other members' expens.					£52.00								£52.00
Minute Secretary's hon.													£0.00
Website		£97.49									£114.44		£211.93
Room hire													£0.00
Publicity					£226.95								£226.95
Auditor					£30.00								£30.00
Subscriptions	£50.00						£86.34			£97.56	£143.88		£377.78
Insurance		£82.54											£82.54
Ex gratia payments													£0.00
Donations	£50.00								£50.00	£50.00	£50.00		£200.00
Miscellaneous expend.													£0.00
Leaf clearing projet										£142.88			£142.88
Grant exp: Bench, Plwth pvmts						£949.84		£293.00		£760.00			£2,002.84
													£0.00
													£0.00

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
03 Jan 23	Cockburn Assoc. (SO)			£40.00	£6433.19
06 Jan	Leaf clrng gathrng (refd. HZ)	**56**	11	£142.88	£6290.31
13 Jan	Polwarth Pvts. (PAS)	58	12	£510.00	£5780.31
17 Jan	Donation to BEC foodbank:2	59	10	£50.00	£5730.31
31 Jan	Polwarth Pvts. (PAS)	60	13	£250.00	£5480.31
31 Jan	Zoom meetings (refd. DM)	61	14	£57.56	£5422.75
07 Feb	Zoom meetings (refd. RM)	62	15	£143.88	£5278.87
07 Feb	Website (refd. EK)	63	16	£114.44	£5164.43
07 Feb	Donation to BEC foodbank:3	64	10	£50.00	£5114.43

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