

LEITH LINKS

COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES

MONDAY 26 APRIL 2021

6.30pm

online, via Zoom

Councillors Present: Gail Clapton (Treasurer), Abigail Cunningham, Angus Hardie, Andrew Mackenzie, Sally Millar (Secretary), Chrissie Reid, Jim Scanlon (Chair), Eileen Simpson, Michael Traill (Engagement Officer).

Elected Representatives: Councillor Chas Booth, Deidre Brock MP, Councillor Adam McVey, Councillor Gordon Munro.

In attendance: members of the public.

Minute Taker: Kay Goodall.

1. Welcome, Apologies

Chair welcomed everyone. Apologies were received from David Igoe, Tommy Sheppard MP

2. Adoption of Minutes of last meeting on Monday 29 March 2021

Proposed by Michael Traill; Seconded by Abigail Cunningham.

Available at <https://leithlinksc.org.uk/>

3. Correspondence, Reports from Police Scotland and Elected Representatives

Police

Community Beat Officers PC Kris O'Donnell and PC Lauren Mitchell provided a written report.

Beat Hunger Campaign: over 100 food parcels have been distributed across the Leith area.

Anti-Social Behaviour: Leith officers have carried out proactive patrols regarding the attacks on Lothian Buses, and youths have been charged. Patrols have also tackled public urination, and PCs Mitchell and O'Donnell are dealing with drug dealing in the Links and ASB within local housing.

School Parking Patrols: PCs Mitchell and O'Donnell carried out more School parking patrols, mainly around St Mary's and Leith Primary School. Parents were spoken to about the "Safer Streets" campaign and encouraged to park further away from the schools. Edinburgh Council has been contacted and signs repositioned to make it clearer to drivers.

Elected Representatives

Brexit: Deidre Brock MP noted that increasing numbers of businesses are contacting her, negatively

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affected by the new import/export controls and expenses caused by Brexit – these are ongoing issues not just ‘teething problems’

COP26: holding this in Glasgow is challenging, but global south states (who are most affected by climate issues) are keen to hold it in person not online. It may still be postponed entirely.

Temporary toilets in parks: Cllr McVey noted that the worst problems have occurred in the Meadows and at Portobello Beach, but as a busy Premier Park, Leith Links should also be provided with temporary toilets. Cllr Booth is working to ensure that there will be full public access to the toilets Earth in Common will provide when the pavilion is refurbished, and thought that Council should contribute money towards that end - but CC members pointed out that this may not be for years, whereas the Links needs temporary toilets immediately, and were anxious that Leith Links should not be short-changed and missed off plans in the meanwhile. There are possibilities within the bowling green area building and indeed new toilets are among the few things that CAN be built on the Links. (The main costs are not the building of toilets but the ongoing costs of maintaining, paying staff etc.)

PC McArthur-Kerr asked that public urination or defecation observed should be reported to police on 101, and logged, as it is an offence.

Action: LLCC will contact Paul Lawrence and group leaders in CEC to emphasise the need to include Leith Links in the plans for temporary toilets.

4. Planning Matters

Meetings with developer, Salamander Street

Members met with the agents for the Russell Transport site with regard to their PAN. 5 July is the date to determine decision in principle.

Seafield coastal communities

Members are meeting regularly with the team and will be attending a ‘Sounding Board’ (meeting with all stakeholders, including CEC and developers) in May. Joint CCs are aiming to submit a bid for funding for ‘Place Based Investment’ from Scottish Government, for a brief for a team of consultants to draw up a community-led masterplan for the site. SEPA lost a lot of data in a hack, which has held up CEC. The research from Glasgow University relating to sea-level rise and coastal erosion has changed the agenda, as it is now clear that some parts of the site will not be suitable for development.

5. Travel & Mobility matters: Consultations and Responses.

Concurrent consultations: LLCC and Leith Harbour & Newhaven CC have raised concerns about the

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lack of integration of all the various new plans for Leith. Director of Place Paul Lawrence has agreed to a meeting, which has been set up for 11 May.

Roundabout at foot of Easter Road: the traffic light schedules have again become chaotic and traffic congestion is worsening. Cllr McVey confirmed that there are problems. He has followed this up and an engineer has been sent out.

6. Tree planting / Arboretum on Leith Links: guest speakers Scott Thomson and Steven Cuthill of CEC Parks Dept

Chair noted that five new trees have been planted in the middle of the grass, and it appears that a large arboretum has been planned without any consultation or engagement with the community. CEC failed to consult when the playpark was first being designed, and LLCC's consultation then transformed the plans. It is very disappointing that this lack of community engagement has recurred. Scott and Steven apologised for the current position. Steven explained that tree planting is an annual activity and that these particular trees were a gift from the Botanics, available only for a short time, so a quick decision had to be made.

Further information about the arboretum plans can be found here: <http://www.elgt.org.uk/projects/greenspace-improvements/leith-links-arboretum/> and here: <https://www.thrivinggreenspaces.scot/> The Botanics has identified a range of endangered conifer species to represent all the different regions of the world. CEC aims to have a million trees by 2030 (an additional 250,000), so this would contribute to the tree planting total and help to conserve species. CC members said they were not anti- tree planting but felt that it was important that the right trees were planted in the right places. The Links are very well used open green spaces, the soil is very sandy and the area is quite exposed to wind.

Scott said that an architect did take into account other activities in the area. Educational signage could be added to inform the public about the trees. They agreed that further feedback from the community would be included in the consultation and planning from now on.

ACTION: ELGT will suspend the consultation for now. LLCC will advise on a revision of the survey questions, and then will share the plans and revised survey on the LLCC website and social media, in order to collect feedback from the local community, before any further decisions are taken about the arboretum plans.

Several concerns were expressed emphatically at the meeting- not about tree-planting as such, which the CC in general supports - but about the lack of prior notice and consultation, particularly for such a significant change and new development like this on the Links. It is not appropriate for

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CEC to make these decisions about common good land on the community's behalf without consultation. The view was expressed that it was remarkable that the Council had failed to meet even the most basic of the National Standards for Community Engagement <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>

Cllr Booth agreed with community concerns while defending the work of CEC officers in general. Cllr McVey noted that CEC has committed to a full plan on community engagement, to be provided within 12-16 weeks. Cllr Munro noted that a large arboretum is problematic for an area of the Links well-used by many sectors of the community, including schools, cricket and the golf society. The community should be consulted widely to ensure that it would be seen as an asset.

Other points raised included public safety, especially in the dark, is also a consideration if new densely wooded areas are added. If the arboretum is to be advertised as a 'visitor attraction', then consideration should be given to parking and toilet facilities.

Concerns were also expressed about the poor maintenance of the trees that are already there, many of which have died, apparently due to lack of resources in the Parks Dept to support them. The Parks Dept say they are making changes to achieve more reliable watering and maintenance for young trees.

The Council officers responded that they will hold back any further planting until after a full Masterplan for the Links as a whole is developed in the summer. They will use the help of 'Thriving Green Spaces' in drawing this up. The community will be consulted and the plan will go to relevant council committees.

Chair thanked Scott and Steven and emphasised LLCC's gratitude to them for giving their time to respond to many, often hostile, questions. The Parks Dept officers welcomed the insights they received: this is the beginning of a valuable conversation.

Further comments from attendees at the meeting (via the 'Chat' function) can be found in APPENDIX 1, below

7. Parks & Greenspaces matters

Debrief on public meeting re Bowling Green area, held on 19 April

A very large number of local people participated. Cllr Rob Munn gave a presentation explaining the legal position. Abby has created a word cloud that summarises the many suggestions made (for medium and long term uses of the area and building) Minutes were taken of the discussion (available on the LLCC website. There will be a separate website section to enable proposals and

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public feedback, and there will be a separate mailing list. Meeting agreed to call this campaign “Leith Links Plus”. Meeting agreed to accept a donation that has been offered of £100 to cover the cost of a banner to engage park users who may not know about the online meetings. Another meeting will be held in May.

ACTION: Michael will set up the website section.

A short-term aim agreed by the meeting was to get the area ‘tidied up’ in time for summer. A clear up of litter and broken glass is needed. More benches and bins are needed. The bowling green building is covered in graffiti. CEC could be approached to meet the costs of removing this and repainting.

ACTION: Cllr Booth will raise this with CEC officers.

8. Open Forum / News & Events in the community / AOCB

Chair commented that having moved online has led to many more members of the community not only attending but also being actively involved, asking questions and contributing. The hustings were particularly successful in attracting many more people than could fit into the community centre. Face-to-face meetings are also important but some online meetings could continue.

ACTION: meeting agreed to consider this further.

Meeting ended at 8.35pm.

Date of next public meeting: Monday 31st May 2021, 6:30pm online.

APPENDIX 1 Zoom Chat Notes

The apology from the two visiting council officers was appreciated, and people were grateful that they had joined the meeting and shared information. (MT/GC)

Concerns about the project centred around the lack of consultation, and included:

- People are not against the Arboretum as such but are concerned about the lack of consultation at an earlier stage. (GC/MT)
- Surely it’s just good manners to let the community (council) know before going ahead? (I&D)
- You need to come to the community before you develop the master plan – that’s what community engagement is for. (CMcC)
- People can’t express a view on the Arboretum if they don’t know what it actually will be. (TP)
- When will the consultation be available? And where can we find it? What is the timetable for the consultation, decision (and who decides) and implementation? (TP)
- This is not normal maintenance but a special project. Before planning substantial changes in an area, there is a need to make local people aware of it and give them an opportunity to feed into a genuine consultation process. (I&D/ CMcC)
- If the Council Officers want people to engage, they need to make a space for a real conversation to take place. (CMcC)

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- Who or what is 'Thriving Green Spaces' – is it part of CEC? (AC)
- What is the status of the consultation, is it being shared, or revisited?
- It takes up nearly half the East Links. (AC)
- Is the Links not Common Good land? How can this go ahead without adequate consultation? The lack of notice is surprising when even small changes like a statue need an Act of Parliament. (I&D)
- It's telling that I look out onto this area of the Links, and this is the first I've heard about it. It's an interesting idea but it needs to be part of a wider discussion including where it fits in the master plan. (CMcC)
- These are not just trees, the proposal has areas of flowing grassland from Japan, a concrete area and educational signage. (TP)
- Why have we been previously told no cherry trees as they are not indigenous here? (GC)
- Will it still be possible to play cricket and golf? (TP)
- There are concerns about parking, if this is to become a visitor attraction. (BG)
- Could details be put on info boards on the Links? (TP)
- How are the Council et al engaging with those who are not online/with access issues etc? (MT)
- What does the current master plan say about anything, including bowling greens? (TP)

There was concern about lack of consultation about earlier/existing initiatives:

- Why have we not been made aware of ongoing plans to change the orchard? (MT)
- There are 32 existing cages with dead or no trees, twenty trees trapped in cages, diseased/in dire need of pruning/care. Shouldn't funding be spent there? (TP/AC)
- There should have been some signage about the new trees to explain where they were from and why they had been planted – no-one knew anything about them. (GC)
- Does the Council not have a policy about planting native species? People ask for flowering cherries and don't want conifers. (JS)
- There is lots of bamboo along the railway path, presumably a garden plant gone wild? (TP)
- Officers say they will also be replanting dead/dying trees every year. Why were we not told earlier about this? (MT)

Can a takeaway from tonight be a Stakeholders' group, established by LLCC or CEC or both, with joint involvement? (MC)