

LEITH LINKS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES Monday 27 October 2025, 6:30pm

Duncan Place

Present: Gail Clapton, Abigail Cunningham, Avril Ewing, Aric Gilinsky, Angus Hardie, Barbara Kerr, Andy Mackenzie, Sally Millar, Jim Scanlon (Chair), Eileen Simpson

Elected Members: Councillor Chas Booth, Councillor Katrina Faccenda

Apologies: Andrew Ballantine, Aimee McInnes, Teresa Perchard, Councillor Adam Nols-McVey,

Police Scotland: 0 **Members of the Public:** 5

Chair: Jim Scanlon **Minute Taker:** Sally Millar

1. **Welcome, and Apologies** received as above.
2. **Adoption of Previous Minutes.** Proposed: Aric Gilinsky, Seconded: Andrew Mackenzie
3. **Police Scotland Report** – No officers present. Brief report had been sent and circulated.
4. **Guest Speakers:** The Chair welcomed guests from the City of Edinburgh Council: Gareth Barwell, Corporate Director of Place, David Givan, Chief of Planning, and Deborah Paton. Head of Transport, Strategy and Partnership. The main part of the meeting was taken up with a series of Questions and Answers to each of these visitors, and discussion. The stimulus for the meeting was a series of questions posed earlier in the year by the LLCC, *“What is planned for this area, in the next few years and longer term? Is there an overall, connected picture of it all, and of how all these schemes interact with each other, and how they affect local residents (intended and unintended consequences)? Who is in overall charge?” This Community Council would like to be reassured by seeing a coordinated overview of the area, from the perspective of the residents & businesses i.e. the local community as a whole.”*

The main headings covered in this long and interesting discussion were:

Need for Better Communication: Mr. Barwell agreed that better communications were needed between Council and local areas, and said that he was committed to improvement. The example discussed was the (frequent) cases of intensely disruptive roadworks (involving suspended bus stops, closed roads, bus diversions etc. etc.) suddenly being imposed on the local area with no warning, no explanation, no time-scales etc. **ACTION: Cllr. Chas Booth said that Councillors get a weekly email about road works in their area. He was asked to forward this to the LLCC so that it could inform local residents.**

Need for a Strategic Overview / Perspective on Planning decisions: The Leith Links area has suffered for a long time from over-provision of council funded homeless accommodation within a small residential area. The area is now seeing creeping intensification of large hostels and HMOs, extensions to hotels, and a trend towards Change of Use from residential, B&B or ‘boutique hotel’ to very large HMOs and Aparthotels. There is accelerating destruction / downgrading of fine buildings of historical / heritage merit. Planners need to look at the aggregate effect of all this on the neighbourhood. Mr. Givan admitted that planners considered each planning application as a completely separate and there was no overview of the local neighbourhood as a whole, only reference to national and local policies. He stressed that consistency across the city was vital. He apologised for missing earlier correspondence from the LLCC on this topic. He said he would take the matter back for further consideration, but seemed to rule out the idea of having one named officer responsible for having oversight of the whole area. He said planning officers were under-resourced and under pressure which may be why they do not seem able to ‘join up the dots’ and see how different applications are linked, and have difficulty keeping track of complex applications where property owners / developers keep changing their plans. He apologised for how difficult it is for the CC to contact Planning officers by phone and said that a new telephone system is being developed.

Green Spaces: Leith Links park needs an ongoing maintenance schedule (transparent, monitored, accountable) to preserve and improve basic infrastructure. Leith Links has a Master Plan, but this is not being moved forward actively

(while there is progress in other local parks); a strategic timescaled plan is needed, with regular milestones and updates. Mr. Barwell hoped that funds raised through the Transient Visitor Levy would be directed to Premier parks including Leith Links, a team is working on such ideas.

Transport and Mobility: There was discussion about parking pressures in the area, which suffers from displaced parking from Zone 8 and commuter parking in residential streets. Mr. Barwell said the Council is talking to East Lothian and Midlothian about long term strategies to reduce commuter car use, a 'regional' transport strategy is needed. Ms. Paton said the next phase of new CPZ plans would be discussed at the November Transport and Environment Committee. The LLCC felt it was wrong that consultation with local residents was not being carried out. There does not seem to be any strategy to deal with the ongoing problem of parking displacement as CPZs expand across the city. Ms. Paton said there was to be a 'Parking Action Plan' that should provide an overview. There was discussion about the considerable remedial work still needed in the wake of Trams to Newhaven, including promised soft landscaping. Mr. Barwell said the retention bond was still in place so there should be adequate resources to cover this. Asked whether the Edinburgh Street Design Guidelines were to be revised, Mr. Barwell said no, but they should be more strictly applied / enforced.

Place Plans: Mr. Givan was asked whether the Council was committed to respecting the views & wishes of local communities as laid out in a Local Place Plan? (There is a Place Plan for Leith currently in development (cf. Joanne McClelland & Aythan Lewes, also present), which he was aware of, though Mr. Barwell had not been.) He repeated that the Council has to "have regard to" the contents of a Place Plan but as this as all so new, there is no clear picture of what that meant or how this would work exactly. He thought this would be an iterative process as all decisions would need to constantly cross-check and balance up with the National Planning Framework, the city Development Plans, and local policies, as well as Place Plans. The status of a Place Plan is unclear, there could be problems if an area had more than one group putting forward a plan, if these did not match up.

Mr. Givan reminded the meeting that even if the Leith Place Plan is adopted in 2026, it cannot change current policy, only affect future policy development (though as yet unclear to what extent...) He suggested including content relating to leisure and health etc., a Place Plan is not just about planning / buildings. He was reminded by Angus Hardie that that 'planning' was always supposed to include those things, cf. Patrick Geddes, but had badly deteriorated in recent years.

Mr. Givan said council officers had supported the Third Party Right of Appeal but this had been rejected by Scottish Government (Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016), and the council did genuinely want to know what communities wanted. He recommended that the Community Council should perhaps also have a 'policy' on matters of local importance, e.g. short term lets, PBSA

Mr. Givan referred enquiries about Place Plans in the future to council officer Anna Grant.

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Chair sincerely thanked all three visitors for making the effort to come and for being so open to hearing the viewpoint of CC members, and willing to discuss and take back for further consideration. Leith Links was very grateful for their attention, recognising that it would be impossible for them to visit every Community Council in the same way.

5. Update from City Councillors

Flags: Cllr Chas Booth reported that the Council has determined that all flags on lampposts across the city will be brought down asap.

Safe Consumption Room: Council has ruled Leith to be not suitable for as the location for a trial Drug Safe Consumption Room, it will probably be located somewhere in the Old Town / Cowgate area (where the majority of 'street' drug deaths occur).

Cllr. Katrina Faccenda added that she has been liaising on needle exchange scheme.

Bad Landlords: She also reported on a briefing received on private sector letting agents Link Housing, that the

Council has been using as letting agents, e.g. privately owned flats in Duke Street and Great Junction Street, used as temporary homeless accommodation, causing issues on mixed stairs. Landlords are not meeting their responsibilities and need to be reported to the council as not 'fit and proper' (then banned). The Council's Procurement process needs to be reviewed in the light of this. She questioned how transparent the current process is.

6. No Issues Raised by local residents

- 7. Seafield Sewage Plant** –MSP Ben MacPherson has circulated his letter to the Minister re Seafield. The general reaction from CC members is that it seems 'wishy washy'. CC continues to press for a date for the November stakeholder meeting (which seems to have further slipped into December or beyond).

Chair will try to find out more about the developments applied for in the recent Planning Application - how will they affect / mitigate odours?

ACTION: Chair to contact Veolia / SW personnel directly on this. Matt Farnham? Other named individual?

- 8. Planning:** Teresa Perchard had sent a report on objections lodged by LLCC re planning applications, in the past month. The main current concern is 111 Constitution Street, which had planning permission to build residential flats (not built), now applying to change use and build 39 'holiday flats. These are essentially short term lets, which the Council had professed to be trying to reduce, across the city, also is committed to protecting residential properties, due to Housing Emergency.

A matter of great concern generally is the number of applications now appearing for 'Aparthotels', which apparently are entirely unregulated and will not need to be subject to landlord/tenant law (unlike private landlords wishing to rent out properties as short term lets, who also not only need to pay for a licence but also require EICR, an EPC, Pat test, gas safety test, fire risk assessment, legionnaires risk assessment etc.)

9. AOCB

Leith Links Play Park - Cllr Katrina Faccenda reported that there have been some complaints about the state of the Play Park on Leith Links.

Christmas Tree in Leith – Cllr Katrina Faccenda confirmed that the recent press article was wrong – there will again be no Christmas Tree at the Kirkgate but a smaller one and some lights on lampposts, along at Taylor Gardens. She reported a council suggestion that some 'Community Fund' money could be found for a tree (and decorations?) down at the Shore. The CC as unenthusiastic about this, feeling that it did not address the complaint that when you come down the walk to Leith, it is found to be completely 'dark' and undecorated. Cllr. Faccenda said decorations at the Shore were some compensation to businesses down there that have been suffering due to the extended Leith Connections roadworks.

New Parks and Recreation Officer: Laura Shelbourn is being invited to attend the next, November meeting of the CC.

10. Date of Next Meeting: Monday 24 November, in-person Duncan Place.