

LEITH LINKS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES Monday 25 May 2026, Duncan Place

Present: Abigail Cunningham (Chair), Avril Ewing, Aric Gilinsky, Angus Hardie, Barbara Kerr, Andy Mackenzie, Sally Millar, Teresa Perchard

Elected Members: Councillor Chas Booth, Councillor Katrina Faccenda

Apologies: Jim Scanlon, Eileen Simpson

Police Scotland: 0

Members of the Public: 5

Chair: Abi Cunningham

Minute Taker: Sally Millar

1. **Adoption of Previous Minutes.** Proposed: Abigail Cunningham, Seconded: Aric Gilinsky
Matters Arising: still waiting on payment for Gala Day stall from both Leith Central and LH&NCC
2. **Police Scotland** – Report circulated. A few statistics have been included at request of LLCC. added. **Major drug bust highlighted:** Plain clothes officers as part of retail crime initiative discovered drug dealing, leading to arrest and discovery of £150,000 worth of drugs, large amounts of cash, and £100,000 worth of designer goods (possibly stolen) in suspect's flat. **Noise complaints:** significant noise-related incidents reported; may reflect both park activity on good weather days continuing past 11pm and neighbour disputes escalating to involve Council and/or police. **Community policing transition:** John Anderson, community police officer for past year who provided regular reports, has been transferred to another part of city. LLCC recorded thanks to him and wished him well. New officer assigned but details not yet received; Community Council hopes for smooth handover.
3. **Guest Presentation: Sewage Sludge Spreading Campaign**
 - Joey Bowden and Doreen Goulding presented on their 18-year campaign against sewage sludge spreading on agricultural land in Scotland, highlighting the very significant health and environmental risks. They also documented the research into this matter, and the lack of action by Scottish Government, and SEPA.
 - They are calling for immediate action as follows: Moratorium on spreading for minimum one year to conduct significant studies; Scientific Investigation of what exactly is in sewage sludge currently; Research into alternative treatment methods.
 - Longer term, they are advocating: Scottish Government and Scottish Water should take industry back from PFI contractors and invest for the long-term; Look to European practices (e.g. Denmark) for alternative means of disposal. Various methods exist: centrifuging, drying, burning; Edinburgh could potentially be lit or heated by burning sludge with proper safeguards.
 - Investment is essential.

For more details, see Appendix A below

LLCC listeners were shocked to learn how serious this issue is and how little attention has been paid to it. There is an urgent need for political accountability across parties, particularly Green Party given their environmental focus.

In general discussion, further concerns shared about Seafield included condemnation of the continued lack of public engagement and poor communication by Scottish Water. LLCC Annual Report noted repair / work on new underground storage tanks just being started after extended delays, with expectation of "improved conditions in the future."

Action: LLCC Secy to post Guest Speakers' reading list of links on LLCC website, to share information;

LLCC to continue engagement with anti sewage sludge campaign, now taken up also by some other bodies e.g. Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS): <https://fidra.org.uk/download/sewage-sludge-risks-scotland/>

LLCC reps to add sewage sludge issue on to the agenda for Seafield stakeholder meetings.

4. Update from City Councillors

Councillor Chas Booth is no longer co-convener of Green Group, he now on DMSC (Planning Committee) and Transport and Environment Committee. He reported on Short-Term Lets Enforcement Gap problem, i.e. applicants applying for planning consent to obtain licence, then withdrawing planning application, thus circumventing regulations. Council last week revealed 80% of short-term let applications (both planning and licensing) are second or subsequent applications. He requested data on number of applicants who withdrew planning application after submitting licensing application but Council unable to provide specific numbers; he has requested more granular data. Scottish Government response is apparently to deny the problem exists, stating local authorities have adequate powers available. Councillor Booth is committed to pursuing issue further.

Christmas decorations - Katrina Faccenda reported on the recent meeting with Lindsay Grant which promises good news for Christmas tree at the Kirkgate and decorations for next Christmas in and around Leith. Email update from Lindsay Grant confirms street lighting department should be able to take power line from nearest street lighting column to power Christmas lights. Councillor and Community Council will continue pressing.

Kirkgate bus stop on Great Junction Street - Councillor Faccenda has also been following up vigorously on the issue of this bus stop, now closed for over a year. A re-design has been agreed and she has had assurances it will be re-opened by end of July.

Leith Links Play Park repairs – Councillor Faccenda has escalated this issue to Council Leader Margaret Graham, given the serious concerns and had sent a strong letter copied to Gareth Barwell, Corporate Director of Place. She has received from Parks Technical Manager an apology, a list of ‘excuses’ for the extended delays, including “Prolonged difficulties in progressing these repairs caused by combination of staff shortage within the service, wider supply chain issues affecting availability of specialist parts and equipment, and complexity involved in working with suppliers to identify solutions that are both safe and cost-effective for specific faults affecting units” This was accompanied by a commitment to do better – equipment and components now sourced and repairs should be carried out “in the next 2-3 weeks”. Where agreed targeted repair programme is not delivered within expected timescales, Council will engage additional external support to accelerate delivery.

5. Issues raised by local Residents – none raised

6. Parks and Green Spaces

Play Park Repairs - see (5) above for update

Public Toilets at Links – now due to re-open in approximately two to three weeks, timeline unconfirmed.

Planned mural on the toilet block at Links - Abigail Cunningham has corresponded with Marco Galli of Thriving Green Spaces about this. There is vagueness as to whether or not Planning Permission is required and who would apply / pay for that. Might demonstrating community engagement with the matter potentially help meet planning requirements? Preferred artist (who did Academy building mural) is on maternity leave for 6 months but may contribute to design, but other artist Shona may be available. (Other local artist contacted has a long waiting list of projects.) **Funding:** council budget covers approximately one year; but although hopefully graffiti artists respect commissioned work to some extent, it is wise to reserve some funding for ‘repairs’ in future years (Academy Lofts mural tagged only 4-5 times in 5 years).

ACTION: Design approach agreed is: to focus on nature/biodiversity/environment themes to avoid controversial historical topics; present 3-4 design options to public for feedback at Gala Day, using display board.

West Links Dog Issues – complaints received from member of public (also part of football group) about dog waste on the Links football pitches and dogs digging holes in West Links again. Previous emails sent to Council had received no response.

Action: Abigail Cunningham advising group to forward their complaint to Laura Shelbourn, providing new email address and suggesting copying in Councillors.

Master Plan – LLCC Annual Report 2025-2026 noted "non-action or non-visible action on the Leith Links Master Plan due to funding difficulties."

7. Draft Joint Leith Place Plan - now in the final stages. Small group of LLCC members has given extensive feedback at several stages, Joanna and Aythan responsive to comments and have made most requested changes. Now separated into clearer sections: Place Plan is a short section focusing narrowly on planning issues (format for Council relevant to planning legislation and policy) and Community Action Plan section. Time to finally decide whether the LLCC wishes to endorse it. Proposed by Abigail, Sally, Teresa, Barbara that LLCC endorse it.

Vote outcome: Community Council (7 members) endorsed draft Neighbourhood Plan with one abstention (member had only read first draft, not second), with the **Key provision:** Endorsed "with the proviso that it's seen as a living document which could get updated over time" including before City Plan 2040 implementation, recognizing things change and document shouldn't be "carved in stone." **Joint submission logistics:** Plan to be submitted from all three community councils (Leith, Leith Links, Leith Harbour & Newhaven); ongoing coordination between councils needed.

Action: LLCC group now to write short LLCC 'Foreword' to the joint plan (each CC writing their own piece)

8. Planning - Written report circulated. For full details, see Appendix B below. Some worrying decisions by Council, feeding LLCC's persisting concern about the growing number of sites in our area being converted into serviced apartment / holiday flats, apart-hotels, extended hotels, large HMOs, student accommodation etc.

9. Transport and Mobility

- **Kirkgate Bus Stop, Great Junction Street** – see 4, above. Additional problems identified, Councillor Faccenda sent "quite strong and unhappy response" highlighting these issues: Location has become fly-tipping site - bins are constantly full with lids opening, creating obstacle for buses (not just those stopping, but all buses on Great Junction Street when two pass).
- **New Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ)** - implementation timing remains uncertain. Concerns re CPZ include suggestion that current proposed boundaries may be incorrect, CPZ should perhaps extend from the Links to the railway path but not beyond? Recognise that there is always a risk of simply displacing parking problems to adjacent areas.
- **Parking enforcement issues raised:** LLCC has complained about proliferation of vans, caravans, camper vans parking alongside the Links to avoid parking charges elsewhere (some vehicles may have residents living in them). Legally parked vehicles (taxed and insured) are difficult for Council to address, but CC hoping Council could at least focus enforcement on blatant illegal parking (untaxed/uninsured vehicles) first. There is an historical precedent: Community Council successfully addressed similar transient vehicle problem on Links Gardens several years ago through persistent engagement, though process was time-consuming.
- **Road Works Coordination Issues** – Complaints about timing – the new build-out construction outside nursing home scheduled during same week as multiple other road closures, creating access problems. Work was scheduled last October; unclear why delayed until week of maximum disruption. Work is including double yellow lines round corner on Claremont Road and Summerfield Gardens, which is welcome.
Pavement Repairs – still unclear whether the work is to include pavement repairs on Restalrig Road (and much-needed, on Clarebank Crescent). Council staff observed "prodding the pavement" in area last week.
- Councillor Faccenda had offered to arrange face-to-face meeting and site walk to review all necessary work; date not yet confirmed.

10. AOCB

Leith Festival & Gala Day – Barbara reported Festival still seeking pageant participants (until June 7). Festival programs sent to printers and will be distributed: at Food Festival, from Utilita, from Leith Walk police box, from Leith Market etc.

LL Community Council on Gala Day:

- Sally, collecting and returning gazebo, help needed to erect and take down, and to man the stall throughout the day.
- Topics for public engagement - mural design options display to gather community reactions / input.
- Leaflets - new leaflets being printed to try to encourage recruitment of new Community Councillors, to be distributed at Gala Day and subsequently.

11. Next Meeting – 29 June 2026, 6:30pm in person at Duncan Place

Action Items

- **Abigail:** Forward Bob McAllister's play park email to post on website and update community newsletter
- **Councillor:** Follow up on Seafeld sewage sludge issue at stakeholder meetings
- **Abigail:** Coordinate mural design options for Gala display board
- **Community Council:** Provide Joey Bowden and Doreen Goulding's sewage sludge research documents and publications list electronically for website posting
- **Community Council:** Chase Council for new community police officer contact details
- **Councillor:** Add van/camper van parking enforcement to follow-up list with Council officers
- **Community Council:** Coordinate with other two community councils on Joint Place Plan submission and communication strategy

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APPENDIX A

Sewage Sludge

Sewage sludge composition includes human waste, industrial effluent, hospital/laboratory/funeral parlour waste, dental waste, veterinary waste, drug residues (contraceptives, antidepressants, statins, amphetamines), PFAS (forever chemicals), microplastics, heavy metals, antibiotic-resistant bacteria and genes.

2004-2009 period:

- First petition raised by Community for the Borders in 2004
- Sewage sludge banned from sea disposal in 1999 after killing microorganisms supporting aquatic life
- Subsequently promoted as fertilizer based on nitrogen and phosphorus content
- Campaign began in 2009 after local residents raised concerns about spreading near homes

2012-2015 developments:

- September 2012: British Science Festival at Aberdeen University featured scientists declaring sewage sludge spreading should stop until further investigation, stating it was "more concerning and more dangerous than climate change"
- James Hutton Institute spearheaded this call, supported by Scottish Government
- 2012-2014: Numerous meetings with Falkirk Council Environmental Health and Planning, SEPA, Scottish Water highlighting contractor exploitation and lack of regulation
- 2014: Campaigners wrote to 14 different bodies including MSPs, SEPA, Scottish Water, Scottish Government, Food Standards Agency
- November 2014: Margaret Mitchell MSP stated Scottish Government would review the practice; this failed to happen
- March 2015: Multi-agency meeting at SEPA offices in Stirling produced no progress

2015-2021 advocacy:

- April 15, 2015: Petition EP1563 lodged with Scottish Parliament calling for ban on sewage sludge spreading
- 2016: Scottish Government published sludge review with 21 key recommendations; none implemented.
- January 2017: Invited by Children's Commissioner for Scotland to present to UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Hazardous Substances
- September 2017: UN Rapporteur's report noted lack of regulation and Scottish Government's non-responsiveness, highlighting "severe difficulty in assessing information" as recurring theme
- 2018: Scottish Government commissioned James Hutton Institute for updated health risk assessment with consultation; final five-part report not made public

2021-2025 legal action:

- June 2021: Contacted Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS) for legal advice as one of their first clients
- ERCS advised Freedom of Information request for James Hutton Report publication
- October 17, 2021: Report released after amendment at Scottish Government officials' request, "clearly then calls into question its impartiality"
- Report made no mention of PFAS or microplastics despite their presence being known since 2012
- Report excluded animal health "specifically at the request of the Scottish Government" despite studies showing 40% increase in foetal abnormalities in cattle and sheep grazing on treated land
- 2025: Environmental Authorisation Scotland Amendment Regulations proposed but "still do not go far enough to address all the various concerns over monitoring, enforcement, toxic contaminants, animal health"
- New regulations "not fully operational or in force on the ground"; contractors "continue to operate at will"

International Context - Countries that have banned sewage sludge spreading: Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands (Netherlands now exporting toxic sewage sludge to UK after banning it domestically!)

Health and Environmental Impacts

Human health risks:

- Toxic cocktail of pathogens increases over time when stored or applied to land
- Components bioaccumulate in food chain, creating toxic prions
- Prions identified as sole cause of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
- Root vegetables (potatoes, carrots, parsnips) absorb toxins and chemicals from treated soil

Animal welfare:

- Studies at Glasgow and Nottingham Universities (2014) showed 40% increase in foetal abnormalities in cattle and sheep grazing on sludge-treated land
- Farmers and shepherds reported witnessing animal health impacts
- Different meat markets exist, with lower-quality meat from affected animals going into cheaper products and frozen foods

Local incidents:

- Primary school near Falkirk had sports day cancelled when children vomited in playground due to stench from spreading around school perimeter the day before
- Recent case of resident having sludge spilled on road near property, stored in field, then spread into her garden along boundary

Regulatory Failures

Self-regulation issues:

- Safe Sludge Matrix voluntary guidance framework over 25 years out of date and "systematically ignored by contractors"
- No single statutory body taking responsibility for management or control as of 2009
- Contractors oversubscribing amounts to areas accepting sludge, with some taking "5, 6, 7 times the amount that they should"

Current enforcement gaps:

- SEPA now legally responsible as single enforcement body under 2025 legislation but "SEPA don't seem to know that"
- SEPA lacks resources and received no additional funding for enforcement
- When contacted about recent spillage, SEPA redirected to Environmental Health/Council; Council redirected back to SEPA

Regulation non-compliance:

- Supposed to be ploughed to minimum 2 feet depth; not consistently followed
- Should be 150 meters from occupied properties; frequently violated
- Farmers often unaware of oversubscription when subcontracting to companies

Industry Structure

- 88% of sewage treatment industry operates under PFI (Private Finance Initiative) limited-term contracts
- Veolia runs operations under PFI concluding in 2029
- Limited-term contracts discourage necessary long-term investment
- Multi-million pound waste industry run in many instances by people of "questionable character"

Proposed Solutions

Immediate action requested:

- Moratorium on spreading for minimum one year to conduct significant studies
- Investigation of what exactly is in sewage sludge currently
- Research into alternative treatment methods

Long-term recommendations:

- Scottish Government and Scottish Water should take industry back from PFI contractors and invest for long-term
- Look to European practices: Denmark has "really good system for alternative means of disposal"
- Various methods exist: centrifuging, drying, burning; Edinburgh could potentially be lit or heated by burning sludge with proper safeguards
- Investment essential but delayed due to four-year government terms and five environmental ministers during campaign period.

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APPENDIX B

Leith Links Community Council 25 May 2025

Planning matters report by Teresa Perchard, Leith Links Community Council planning lead

Here is a note of recent and current significant planning applications and decisions in our area.

Decisions made by the Council (where LLCC commented or objected)

1. **Elbe Street STL refused** - As expected the **RETROSPECTIVE CHANGE OF USE FROM DWELLING TO SHORT TERM LET. at 3F2 49 ELBE STREET EDINBURGH EH6 7HP . 26/00868/FULSTL was refused.** A brief notice of decision includes the following fairly standard phrase from CEC decisions on individual short term lets.

'The change of use of this property to a short term let (STL) will have an unacceptable impact on neighbouring amenity. The loss of the residential accommodation has not been justified. Whilst it is recognised that there is an economic benefit to the City as a whole from the provision of tourist accommodation, in this case it does not outweigh the adverse impact on residential amenity or the loss of residential accommodation.'

2. **Six holiday flats get go-ahead** - In contrast to the above decision where residential uses are highly protected CEC has **given consent** to the conversion of the former motorbike showroom on the corner of John's Place with Queen Charlotte Street to six serviced apartments. **25/03511/FUL|Change of use from vehicle showroom (Sui Generis) to 6 serviced apartments (Sui Generis) & associated alterations (as amended).**|58 - 66 Queen Charlotte Street Edinburgh EH6 7ET. The Report of Handling (explaining the decision) says:

The proposal is acceptable in terms of section 64 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 as it will preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area. The change of use to serviced apartments for short term let (STL) use will not have a materially detrimental effect on the living conditions of nearby residents or an unacceptable impact on local amenity or the character of the area. The proposal complies with the Development Plan Policy LDP Hou 6 and NPF4 30(e)(i). Overall, the proposal complies with the Development Plan. There are no material considerations that outweigh this conclusion. The proposal is acceptable.

There were only 9 comments on this application, perhaps reflecting the declining residential neighbourhood as more 'hotel' type accommodation is created particularly on John's Place. LLCC objected – but made it clear we would not object to a change of use to residential. This 'intensification' of non-residential use in the area, which is a creeping development, is potentially contrary to another aspect of the Development Plan policy 'Hou7' but the decision fails to

mention this point or address it and weigh it in the balance. The policy seems pointless if it is never actually applied. Across the city the Council seems to be consenting large numbers of serviced apartments which might well have met needs for permanent residential use instead, so perhaps the housing emergency is over?

Applications made where comments and objections from LLCC will probably be made

- 1. Change of use for part of the basement and an outshoot of an existing office building to form 1 No. studio apartment and 1 No. 2 bed apartment for short term let purposes. At 60 Constitution Street Edinburgh EH6 6RR 26/01724/FULSTL**

This is a re-submission essentially of an earlier proposal involving the Destined for Home shop and adjacent office premises. It is across the border in LHNCC land but we sent in a comment on the last application which was withdrawn reflecting concerns about the continued, creeping intensification of holiday apartments in the area which changes the commercial and residential character, such that it remains, on some of our streets. Comments due **29 May 2026**

- 2. Demolition of existing garage and erection of two storey building to house two flats. at 2 Claremont Park Edinburgh EH6 7PH 26/01602/FUL**

This is a resubmission of an application recently refused by CEC. Not yet established what changes to the scheme have been made to address the previous reasons for refusal. Comments due by **5 June 2026**

- 3. Listed Category: B Leith Conservation Area Change of use of office to two bedroom house for short term letting. at 63 Queen Charlotte Street Edinburgh EH6 7EY 26/01818/FULSTL**

As this is a proposal to change an office to short term letting accommodation I expect the Council will approve it as they have the showroom. Again this creeping intensification of holiday flats blocks out any potential to increase residential use in the area, unless the bottom drops out of Edinburgh's tourist economy. Comments due by **12 June 2026**

- 4. The development of 4 No. residential mews style dwellings and associated bin storage. Existing commercial bin store to be demolished and integrated into the new development. at Land 41 Metres West Of 2 Chandler Crescent Edinburgh 26/01970/FUL**

An interesting development of a 'dead lot' off Salamander Street. Neighbours on Links Gardens with rear gardens adjacent are concerned about the impact on their privacy and daylight. Suspect if the decision CEC made about 40 studio holiday flats in a pen off Leith Walk is anything to go by, the residents' concerns will not prevent approval. An access lane to the scaffolding warehouse is between the mews houses and the Links Gardens' rear gardens. There may be issues about the outside amenity space of these properties. **26/01970/FUL** Comments by **12 June 2026**

- 5. Finally - Scandal of the Month - 26/02040/CON|Complete Demolition in a Conservation Area (in retrospect).|111 - 115 Constitution Street, 18 - 25 John's Lane Edinburgh EH6 7AE This is the latest move in a proposal to create 39 holiday flats on Constitution Street!!**

There is planning permission for a residential development here but last Summer the owner (K & S Mir) – having given notice of commencement of the project in May 2025 – applied for change of use to 'serviced apartments'. The planning application has not yet been decided but the application to demolish some buildings on the site suggests the Council is moving to consent this scheme – as the owner would not bother getting the demolition consent without having had a 'tip off' that the other consent was likely. LLCC will object to this. It would be really good to know what the local Councillors actually think about the continued development of holiday flats in this area, and across the City. Also how can we ensure this proposal gets **proper** scrutiny at a Planning Committee? Comments due by **19 June 2026**

Teresa Perchard

Leith Links Community Council planning lead