



Review of the 2021-22 Session

Introduction

After the more restricted activity of the 2020-21 session (primarily as a lack of useful activity that could be done during the worst of lockdown), Southside Community Council have met more regularly in 2021-22, having 9 meetings in the year, on par for years before the pandemic. There were no meetings in July, August & January, but these months have often been skipped in the past due to lack of availability by members or business to engage with.

Having more experience with online meetings, full Zoom access, and there being more business to deal with meetings have also returned to more normal lengths, and we have seen more members of the public engaging with online meetings than last year. Unfortunately, due to continuing concerns about meeting in person and then difficulties accessing a suitable venue we have not been able to hold an in-person meeting until this latest meeting, our AGM. Hopefully for the 2022-23 session we will be able to hold in person meetings more regularly.

Membership

The Community Council currently has 9 members, 5 of whom were elected, and 3 representatives from local organisations, plus a minute taker. We were running at very low members of participants at the beginning of the year, as some members appeared to stop engaging over the lockdowns, but in December 3 new members were coopted onto the council.

After the 2021 AGM (June), Tim Pogson had been re-elected as chair, Joan Carter as Vice Chair, and Philip McDowell as Webmaster. Stephen Rodger was elected as Secretary, but we were left without Treasurer as no one had taken over the role since Svetlana Repanova stood down as she moved out of the area. This would be a continuing matter through the year, which was only solved in May when Philip Pinsky kindly volunteered to take over. Unfortunately, as Tim Pogson was selected to be a council candidate (and subsequently been elected) we no longer have a chair, and as yet no replacement has been found.

Summary of activity in the year

Throughout the year we have been engaging in the day to day activity of the community council in meetings, such as responding to planning applications of potential concern, hearing reports from councilors, and responding to public consultations. We have also started hearing more concerns from the public as people are starting to reengage with our activities.

There have been a number of notable items Southside Community Council have been involved in:

In September we discussed and submitted a response to the consultation on the Low Emissions Zone. We supported the Zone in principle, but we did have some concerns regarding some of the boundaries and the individual details of the scheme, which we fed into the consultations. On 31 March 2022 the Transport and Environment Committee approved the Low Emission Zone Scheme Proposal, following legal processes. The city centre LEZ was approved by Scottish Ministers on 19 May 2022 and was introduced on 31 May 2022. Enforcement will start on 1 June 2024, following a two-year grace period for all.

In October we had been informed that local residents had been having issues with noise, smells and deliveries at the Holyrood Distillery. We managed to get the City councilors involved, and Joan Carter met with staff from the Distillery alongside members of the public to discuss matters. This has proved to be an ongoing matter, the disagreements with the Distillery have not been resolved; however we have been told that since the Community Council has become involved the Distillery have become more responsive to queries and seem to have taken matters more seriously.

In November we were invited to meet the developers for a site in East Newington Place, which it was proposed would be turned into new purpose built student accommodation with 63 flats. Three members went, and discussed it with the developers, but we all agreed that more student accommodation did not meet the needs of the local area, and so we put in an objection to the development. When combined with objections from the public, the number was sufficient to require being sent to committee, where the plans were rejected. One matter of concern was that Planning officials seemed to recommend approving this development even though it appeared to clash with planning policies. The developers have put in an appeal, but we hope that will fail. We are looking at possible alternatives for the site, such as affordable housing funded by the proposed development on Davie Street.

The Bernard Terrace zebra crossing that the Community Council had been pushing for was finally completed in November. The construction was repeatedly delayed for a number of reasons, but Philip McDowell remained in contact with the council staff responsible to ensure unnecessary delays were kept to a minimum. This a positive result of a campaign the Community Council has been backing for a number of years now. (14 years in all.)

In December, we also discussed the City 2030 plan, a major plan for the city for the next 10 years, and made a submission to the consultation summarizing our thoughts on the plans.

When it was discovered the old Scottish Widows building was being repurposed we sought the help of local councilors in identifying who had become responsible, and what the future plans for the site would be. This proved to be trickier than expected, but in the end we were contacted by company responsible for the site. Members of the community council visited the site in April to see it and discuss the challenges of converting the site. The current intention seems to retain it as office space (after substantial modernization work), but the proposed plans seem to include at least an element of housing, but we will need to keep an eye on the development plans as it proceeds.

In April we held a hustings for the May local council elections. This was only the second time we have held an event like this, and the first since lockdown. It was a little touch and go finding a location, but in the end it was a success. Attendance was probably not as high as the General Election in 2019, but given the short notice, people still getting used to in-person events after covid, and the lower levels of engagement local council elections usually see it was well attended and we had some genuinely challenging questions asked.

Ongoing matters

We had been contacted by members of the public with concerns about the noise from students staying in the Unite Student Accommodation at Salisbury Court. We had discussed this with representatives from the University, but as a private student accommodation block it was primarily the responsibility of Unite. We have contacted the operations manager for the site, but unfortunately as yet they have either been unavailable or had to leave our meeting before they could discuss matters with us.

As said before, the disruptions caused by the Holyrood Distillery are still occurring.

One thing we have not been able to receive since meetings moved online has been regular local police reports, as they have stated they do not attend online meetings. This will hopefully change in the near future with the return of in-person meetings. We did get a written report when requested in March.