

THE SOUTHSIDE ASSOCIATION

117 Nicolson Street

Edinburgh

EH8 9ER

Founded 1972

Scottish Charity No SCO12262

Minutes of meeting held in the South Side Community Centre on Tuesday 3 February 2015 at 7pm

PRESENT: Lisa Sibbald (Chair), Tom King (Vice-Chair), Moira Gibson (Minutes Secretary), Hilary McDowell, Tom Bonallo, Kenny McLeod, Joan Carter, Stephen Carter, Maggie Bagan, Isobel Leckie, Eileen Holttum, Bill Coppock, Maurice Naftalin, Fran Gifford, Colin Kirby, Sharon Kirby, Jez Kempston, David Wood, Ola Oduku, and Dora Lola-Luz.

Also present were: Councillor Jim Orr, PC Matt Murano from Police Scotland, Kevin Hawes from the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership, and our Guest Speaker, Prof Charlie Jeffery.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Lisa Sibbald welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Marco Biagi MSP, Susan Brown, Jo Scott, Colin Symes, Colin Christison, George Pitcher, Linda Femister, May Linton, Ethel Murray, Jan Fraser, and Derek Suttie.

2. Police Report

PC Matt Murano said Police Scotland had received 487 calls from the public during January. 167 crimes were reported with the majority relating to misuse of drugs, housebreaking and shoplifting, and 77 of these were solved. Operation Comatus involves extra police patrols every day. As in previous months, he emphasised the importance of fitting good locks on properties, particularly main doors, so that drug users cannot gain access to stairwells and basements. Montague and Rankeillor Streets are particularly vulnerable since they are close to the pharmacy dispensing free clean needles and the shops which sell legal highs. As well as locking doors, residents should not 'buzz' in anyone without checking their ID. Residents are advised to dial 101 to alert police to drug use/users, 200 2000 for the Council to collect needles, and 999 if they feel their person or property is threatened.

When asked about graffiti, he responded that, while not a Police priority, work was done on tag-matching and, where possible, apprehending offenders.

3. Guest Speaker

The guest speaker was Professor Charlie Jeffery of the University of Edinburgh. Prof Jeffery started by saying that he had only been in post as Senior Vice Principal since 1 October, so had some catching up to do. He is very keen to work with the local community on issues of mutual interest and to listen to all views. He had attended the Association's Christmas Lights event and enjoyed very much meeting members there. He was aware of the strong concern felt locally about students living in the community, both in purpose-built halls of residence and in HMO flats.

He began by outlining the advantages the University – currently ranked 17th best in the world - brings to the city (third largest employer in the city; University expenditure supports local suppliers and services; student expenditure supports local shops, services and cultural venues; number of graduates attracts inward investment to the city creating further jobs; University raises Edinburgh's reputation internationally etc). Students come to the University for a range of courses, including to train as doctors, nurses, vets, social workers and teachers so they can contribute to society's health and wellbeing, but he is also aware that the number of students presents challenges, particularly in terms of achieving a balanced and sustainable local community close to the central campus.

The University is carrying out a formal review of its accommodation provision and the accommodation guarantees it gives to first year and postgraduate students. Of the headline figure of 33,000 students at the University of Edinburgh, only 27,000 are full-time students living in the city and some of these live at their parents' home (the other 6,000 or so are distance/online learners or attending credit-bearing courses as lifelong learners). While it is true that student numbers at Edinburgh have grown around 16% over the past decade, numbers have plateaued and future growth is likely to be in distance learning (ie students learning online, without having to live in the city; the University of Edinburgh has round 1m students enrolled in free MOOCs, for example). It should be remembered that the University of Edinburgh is only one of four universities in the city, so it hopes to work with the others to examine the issues and find the best approach.

The University's students are accommodated in a mix of purpose-built halls of residence and flats, and in privately-rented flats spread across the city. It has not been involved at all with the Luton Place proposal, but is on record (prior to Prof Jeffery's taking up his post) as supporting Unite's proposal for developing the Homebase site which would meet the University's need for more accommodation for its first year new undergraduates and allow them proximity to the facilities at Pollock Halls. The University will, of course, respect the Council's decision on this planning application. He acknowledged the strong local concern about this development and others on the Southside and wished to assure members that the University is also actively looking at working with private developers at sites on Leith Walk and at the option of developing its own facilities on its King's Buildings campus.

Prof Jeffery would like to open up more opportunities for an ongoing dialogue between the University and the city, especially the Council, and between the University and the communities neighbouring its campuses. The University wishes to do more to share facilities and projects and, most immediately, to work with the community to find the best way to address the challenges of accommodating its students. Ola referred to the work done by the (now defunct) University Settlement, saying that this sort of outreach was valued, and said local people would appreciate free use of facilities such as the Centre for Sports and Exercise.

Joan Carter and others raised the issue of the poor behaviour of students living in the HMO flats and asked what sanctions could be imposed on those who do not respect their neighbours. Prof Jeffery responded that the University was now much more aware than previously of what could and should be done. It is seeking to do much more to educate and prepare students about their duties as good neighbours and was carefully considering what might be done, on a case-by-case basis, to apply sanctions.

Tom King said that students living in Pollock Halls, for example, were not bothersome but more should be done to educate them on tenement etiquette. Kevin Hawes said that there was an annual upsurge of noise complaints for the first few weeks of the academic year – usually about Year 2 students new to tenement living – and that these were referred to landlords to deal with. Hilary asked if Freshers' Week could be reviewed a) because too much of it revolved round alcohol

resulting in poor behaviour and b) because local streets were awash with advertising for cheap drink deals.

Tom and Lisa asked for much more and better information from the University about what is happening, what the policies and plans are and what the community can expect from the University. More should be said about local benefits and what the University can do for local people, not just its global activities and reputation. In terms of interaction with students, he had found EUSA unapproachable, although Isobel Leckie said that she had been successful in involving students in the Causey development project.

Questions were also asked about when work on Buccleuch Place would start, whether it would house only postgraduate students, and what communication would be put in place with residents. Moira agreed to investigate and respond.

Charlie concluded by suggesting that the University would be happy to host a public meeting at which a range of views could be put forward and the way ahead discussed openly and this was supported by several members who were seeking a partnership approach to identifying a vision and a clear plan. He asked members to put forward their ideas on how such a meeting could best be arranged and what the most appropriate format could be. He looked forward to hearing from everyone.

The Chair thanked Prof Jeffery for his presentation.

4. Community Safety Report

Kevin Hawes from the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership picked up a member's query about graffiti. There is a database of tags by which offenders' activities can be tracked. Where possible, offenders are apprehended but often not before they have done considerable damage. Because of this, and the cost of constant re-cleaning of the graffiti in the Innocent Railway tunnel, it is proposed to put up graffiti boards on which graffiti can be sprayed and the boards then removed/replaced.

In relation to the Police Scotland report on misuse of drugs, the number of needles found has reduced from hundreds per week to around 20 per week and property owners and tenants are now better at keeping doors closed and locked to prevent drug users gaining entrance to stairwells.

A pilot scheme to remove trade waste bins from public pavements has been trialled in Rose Street and is to be gradually rolled out across the city. Businesses will be responsible for keeping their waste on their premises and only putting it out on collection days.

5. Minutes of Meeting of 3 February and Matters Arising

- 5.1 Fuller responses to the questions posed to the University alluded to in Section 5.1 are still awaited. Moira will liaise separately with Derek on these.
- 5.2 Section 5.2 of the previous minutes had referred to a discussion about the former Odeon cinema. The Chair reported that Cllr Perry had asked for access for an inspection but we have not yet heard the result. Rumours continue to circulate that private buyers are in the market, but nothing has been confirmed.
- 5.3 The Chair confirmed that the grant received from Castle Rock Edinvar has been invested in creating a new website at www.southsideassociation.co.uk. This will be used to log

minutes and promote news of interest to members and prospective members. The new email for correspondence with the Chair is southsideassociation@gmail.com. In addition, the grant has funded printing of a new A5 flyer, and draft designs were circulated at the meeting. The Chair would welcome members' views on where the flyer should be distributed (eg doctors' and dentists' surgeries) and whether an A4 poster might be helpful.

- 5.4 In Section 6, the Secretary's Report noted a late letter from the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership about their 2015/16 Roads Capital Programme. Subsequent correspondence had assured us that attention will be given to potholes.
- 5.5 The discussion about advertising at the Queen's Hall minuted at Section 8.4 had resulted in the Chair offering to write to the management at the Queen's Hall to lend support. This had been done.
- 5.6 Section 8.6 had referred to plans for the former Post Office, and we were reminded that there had previously been an application for a bistro.
- 5.7 Section 9.1 had referred to plans for upgrading St Patrick Square Gardens. Notification from David Doig at the Council had been received, saying that delays in sourcing materials meant that works are now rescheduled but should be complete by end of March.
- 5.8 Following these amendments, the minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting. Proposer: Maggie Bagan; Seconder: Hilary McDowell.

6. Secretary's Report

Correspondence had been received about the following matters:

- A pilot scheme for permitting bicycles and motorbikes in bus lanes;
- Changes to waiting restrictions in certain zones;
- Dates for the Diary include:
 - Thursday 5 February, 3-7pm, public information session about Phase 3 of the University's Informatics Building, at the Informatics Forum on Buccleuch Street;
 - Saturday 7 February, 1-4pm, Home and Personal Security Event held by Police Scotland at Cameron Toll shopping centre;
 - Monday 16 February, from 7.30pm, Spring Meeting of the Friends of Meadows and Bruntsfield Links in the Pillar Hall, Barclay Viewforth Church;
 - Tuesday 24 February, 2-8pm, Quartermile public event regarding proposed development of the Surgical Building, 1 Lauriston Place.

7. Treasurer's Report

The Chair said that funds remained the same as reported at the January meeting. Once the balance of the Christmas grant from SCNP had been repaid, there would still be more than £2,000 in the bank, although there would be an ongoing cost for hosting of the new website.

8. Planning and Licensing Matters

- 8.1 There was some confusion about why the application for the mountain-biking track had been withdrawn, but this may be because a lease has now been granted.

9. Environmental Matters

- 9.1 Money has been allocated to repair the potholes at a number of the bus stops, including Newington Road, along the main Clerk Street corridor. This will happen later in the year when the weather is better.
- 9.2 The large planters which were removed from outside the Commonwealth Pool will be put back later in the year.
- 9.3 The hard landscaping team is in the area dealing with loose paving slabs such as those on South Clerk Street.
- 9.4 There are ongoing problems with overflowing bins, private, commercial and Council. Environmental wardens are trying to deal with the mess especially at Gifford Park.
- 9.5 The University has cleaned the graffiti off the accommodation block at the corner of West Newington Place and Causewayside. However, there is lots of graffiti elsewhere.
- 9.6 In relation to the new mural, letters have been sent to all the absentee owners of flats on the corner of Gifford Park. The illuminated sign there has been removed in preparation for the work in the area. We are waiting to hear from the cycle team as to when they are doing the work at this junction, and hope that planning permission will come through at the end of March.
- 9.7 We are concerned about empty shops. Peckhams closed at the weekend and the Co-op has applied for planning permission. The Triathlon shop closed a few weeks ago. Choices convenience shop has moved to the other side of Newington Road leaving another empty shop. There are quite a few empty shops at the Newington end.
- 9.8 The hairdresser at 111 Newington Road has appealed against the planning enforcement notice to remove the pink paint. The illuminated sign at the baker's was removed because it was in danger of blowing down in the recent high winds.
- 9.9 The Evening News headline about the Ladyboys not returning to the Meadows is premature because the tender offers are not being opened until 10 February but we understand there has been a lot of interest and the Council is expecting to get three times the amount of money that has been paid before.
- 9.10 Hilary has made a plea to MABLAG to consider names for paths in the Meadow, especially the diagonal one running from Summerhall past the tennis courts to Middle Meadow Walk. David Wood noted that the Gents' loos near those tennis courts have been closed and wondered when they would be re-opening.

10. Reports from other meetings

There were no reports from other meetings.

11. Question and Answer session with the attending Councillor, Cllr Orr

Cllr Orr mentioned the two grants won by Dumbiedykes which had also been flagged by Cllr Burgess at the last meeting. He is keen that the Southside Community Council is re-formed and is to set up an email survey to establish demand.

He was asked whether it would be possible to initiate action on the problem of legal highs locally (eg licensing sellers), but felt this would be difficult. He is, however, taking action on a number of fronts and liaising with local MSPs on this matter.

Cllr Orr mentioned that Council budget cuts might mean closure of certain public toilets in the city, but he hoped that this would not include those in the Meadows. He was asked where responsibility for clearing pavements lies: previously shopkeepers had a duty to maintain a clear area outside their shops but this bye-law seemed to have lapsed. If the responsibility is now the Council's, which department should be contacted? Cllr Orr agreed to investigate the situation.

12. Any other business

Tom King drew members' attention to the latest issue of the Southside Advertiser which offered a platform for news and features from local groups. He wished to notify the Association that, from May, he will step down as Vice-Chair, but will continue to look after the Association's website.

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 3 March in the Southside Community Centre at 7pm as usual. Clare Halliday of Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association will speak about the work of her organisation.