

# THE SOUTHSIDE ASSOCIATION

117 Nicolson Street

Edinburgh

EH8 9ER

*Founded 1972*

*Scottish Charity No SCO12262*

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

**PRESENT:** Lisa Sibbald (Chair), Tom King (Vice-Chair), Moira Gibson (Minutes Secretary), Jan Fraser (Treasurer), Colin Christison (Mailing List and Membership Secretary), Hilary McDowell, Tom Bonallo, Ethel Murray, Kenny McLeod, Joan Carter, Stephen Carter, Fran Gifford, Tim Pogson, Jez Kempston, Dora Lola-Luz, Bob Hodgart.

Also present were: Councillor Cameron Rose, PC Leon Malinowski from Police Scotland, and our Guest Speaker, Clare Halliday of Castle Rock Edinvar.

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and paid tribute to George Pitcher, longtime member of the Southside Association and community stalwart. Several members also offered their memories and appreciation of the valuable contribution George had made over many years to a wide variety of community initiatives and endeavours, and praised his spirit and courage. Apologies for absence were received from Derek Suttie, Susan Brown, Jo Scott, Colin Symes, Linda Femister, May Linton, Maggie Bagan, David Wood, Isobel Leckie, Ola Oduku, Kevin Hawes.

### 2. Police Report

PC Malinowski invited members to give him their views on what more the police could do to prevent or fight crime locally. Currently, police are 'hubbing' at Howdenhall, which may result in less street visibility, but St Leonard's is still staffed 24/7, not least because that's where the cells are located. Calls are prioritised so that, if there's a missing person, fewer police may be on street patrols while the emergency is being dealt with, ie community officers are needed as response officers. The community officers are still very committed to local policing, and value local intelligence and the opportunity to attend monthly meetings of the Southside Association.

There continues to be a lot of housebreaking, with the peak time for break-ins to houses, sheds and garages being 4am. Thieves are looking for valuables, car keys, bikes etc and often make return visits. Many thieves are juveniles who, if caught, can't be locked up. The public must be vigilant in locking doors and windows, and keeping keys and valuables out of sight.

Operation Comatus is still running with an emphasis on combating legal highs especially in Rankeillor and Montague Street. The public is encouraged to call 101 if they see anything alarming as this does not waste police time: rather it helps them map activity and develop their strategy.

### 3. Guest Speaker

The Chair welcomed as guest speaker Clare Halliday from Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association

and thanked her very much for their generous grant to the Southside Association to fund the website and leaflet.

Clare thanked the Chair and talked about the work of Castle Rock Edinvar. The Association is regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Across Scotland, it works with seven local authorities and has 6,500 properties, with neighbourhood plans for all areas. It is part of the People for Places scheme, a UK umbrella organisation with 80,000 properties, which manages Housing Associations, Leisure Centres, and some private housing.

Castle Rock Edinvar has around 1,000 properties on the Southside. It works in partnership with the Council, with community groups and with social enterprises identifying needs, looking at gaps in services and trying to fill them. Clare leads for the Southside and her role includes maintenance of buildings, co-ordinating repairs and tradesmen. The houses can't be sold and the rent can only be spent on certain things.

Available properties on the Southside are advertised through the Council-administered EdIndex system, by which the public can apply for housing. EdIndex currently has 3,500 properties being advertised, and there are 27,000 people on the waiting list, of whom 21% are actively bidding at any one time. Bidders must live in Edinburgh and can bid for a maximum of three properties each week. Decisions are made according to criteria such as the length of time bidders have been on the list, and whether they have particular needs eg Gold Priority is given to those with severe health needs, while Silver Priority could be given to those unintentionally homeless, perhaps suffering harassment or abuse, or in overcrowded conditions or wishing to downsize.

Castle Rock Edinvar gets involved in some community activities, eg it is one of three partners running the Craggs Centre, maintaining the building; it contributes to anti-graffiti initiatives; it has installed raised beds for growing food; it has secured grants to help tenants with decorating their homes or cooking healthy meals.

Clare also spoke about the two-bedroom sheltered dwellings it had built in Moredun for older and disabled people, with which the NHS had been very impressed. A programme of community links supports the residents here and it is being used as an example of excellent practice.

When asked about students in the community, Clare said that the Association would like a more level playing field for acquiring sites and developing properties. It is bound by the rule that 25% of any development should be affordable housing – a rule which does not apply to developers of student housing – so it is usually outbid by those wishing to build student halls of residence. The Council is required to pursue best value. As a result, Castle Rock Edinvar is increasingly able to build only on the edge of the city because it can't afford sites closer to the city centre.

Cllr Rose stated that the Planning Committee was also concerned about the apparent lack of a level playing field and had called for a report on this issue. Cllr Rose thought that the threshold for triggering the 25% affordable housing requirement was any development over 14 properties, but he would check this, and also check whether this 25% rule emanated from a City of Edinburgh Council requirement or from Scottish Government legislation.

Clare mentioned that, of their 1,000 properties on the Southside, many were lived in by unemployed people of working age, often single, with no money to go out, and lonely. Community grants were often targeted at young people of older people, but this group was isolated. Castle Rock Edinvar did what it could via its care and support arm, but would like to do more. Tim Pogson suggested that perhaps the local community could help via some sort of befriending scheme or encouraging tenants to use community facilities.

The Chair thanked Clare very much for her interesting presentation.

#### **4. Community Safety Report**

Kevin Hawes had sent his apologies and would give his report at the next meeting.

#### **5. Minutes of Meeting of 3 February and Matters Arising**

- 5.1 A correction to the heading of Section 5 of the previous minutes was accepted: it should have read 'Minutes of Meeting of 6 January and Matters Arising'.
- 5.2 Section 5.2 of the previous minutes referred to the Odeon. There was still no news of the results of the promised inspection or of the rumours of the sale. Cllr Rose offered to find out more.
- 5.3 Section 5.4 referred to the Roads Capital Programme. The proposals did not appear to have been circulated for decision nor was there any date for a public meeting.
- 5.4 Section 5.7 of the previous minutes referred to work at St Patrick Square Gardens. This had started.
- 5.5 Section 9.4 referred to constant and long-term problems with overflowing bins. Hilary reported unemptied bins on Newington Road. Last month's update from Kevin Hawes on plans to remove commercial bins seemed to be translating into action as Environmental Wardens had been seen auditing commercial bins in the area, with removal scheduled for September/October.
- 5.6 Section 9.6 of the previous minutes referred to the murals at Gifford Park. Planning permission had now been received and there was now a need for volunteer painters. It was suggested that George Pitcher be included as 'a man with a hat', and this was agreed.
- 5.7 Section 9.9 of the previous minutes referred to the Ladyboys Fringe venue on the Meadows. The new tendering process had resulted in Underbelly successfully bidding £40,000 for this site, a big improvement on the £12,500 previously paid by the Ladyboys. The conditions of the new agreement are not yet known.
- 5.8 The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting. Proposer: Hilary McDowell; Seconder: Tom Bonallo.

#### **6. Secretary's Report**

Correspondence had been received about the following matters:

- A Spokes Meeting on 26 March at 7.30 at the Augustin United Church, George IV Bridge. The topic is 'The Bicycle in the City Centre', with guest speaker Cllr Lesley Hinds;
- A letter from the Council with notice of changes to waiting restrictions in certain zones;
- The Domino's Pizza application to extend their opening hours had been refused.

#### **7. Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer noted that the balance of funds was £1,845.63. The funds remaining from the grant for the Christmas Party had been returned to the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership.

## **8. Planning and Licensing Matters**

- 8.1 Unite's application for student housing at the Homebase site had been refused by the Council. Fran Gifford was thanked for her strenuous efforts in campaigning for this result. Unite has said it will appeal and this may be linked to the Lutton Court case which is due to be heard on 19 and 20 March, with the judgement delivered in the summer.
- 8.2 The positive case for supporting Homebase, as opposed to challenging student housing, was discussed. The site is owned by an off-shore company and the lease is running out. However, this Homebase is a core store, and profitable. Its staff are keen for the store to stay open, and the public think it provides a valuable service, particularly to those without a car, thus being in line with the Council's own policies on reducing travel, traffic and so on. Hilary will try to set up a petition to demonstrate support for the store. A similar petition about the Odeon generated 5,300 signatures in four weeks.

## **9. Environmental Matters**

- 9.1 Most issues have already been covered under Matters Arising. It should be noted that, in relation to concerns expressed last month about the vacated Peckhams store, it is likely to be occupied by Scot-Mid/the Co-op.

## **10. Reports from other meetings**

- 10.1 Jo Scott reported back from the MABLAG meeting:
- It appeared that there was a requirement to keep the area for 50 metres round the advertising drums free of leaves and litter;
  - some trees were looking stressed and this was being monitored;
  - there were concerns about the future of the Middle Meadow Walk lavatories;
  - there was a general feeling that a percentage of the income generated from Underbelly via the new tendering process should be earmarked for Meadows improvements;
  - the next MABLAG meeting is 25 March.
- 10.2 Hilary reported back from the SCNP meeting:
- there had been a presentation on Living Landscapes, which basically seemed to be about not cutting the grass round trees to create biodiversity;
  - a second presentation was on the Masterplan for the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. This had been created in close consultation with the patients who wanted green space for mental wellbeing, and this was the theme of the re-development. It was hoped that, in due course, the white block housing University academics could be removed;
  - there had been talk of boosting safety in the Meadows, whether through hedgecutting, CCTV, better lighting etc. None of these measures, in themselves, will guarantee safety so the situation continues to be under review;
  - it is hoped that the Jawbones will be returned soon;
  - all the proposals for community grants were approved at the SCNP meeting;
  - Cllr Melanie Main was confirmed as the new Convenor;
  - a new representative from the Southside Association at the SCNP meetings is required. Bob Hodgart, Hilary McDowell, Jo Scott and Colin Christison will rotate, but a full-time representative would really be appreciated.
- 10.3 Hilary had attended a public consultation event at Quatermile on 24 February:

- she noted that plans for a hotel had been abandoned, and that more housing would now be built. Cllr Rose felt that any new housing would be bound by the 25% affordable housing requirement;
- it was also not clear what the future of the public lavatories on Middle Meadow Walk was, and whether they were protected under the conditions of the original planning application or under Section 75. Cllr Rose offered to investigate;
- Hilary had asked at the consultation why the gates to the Meadows were locked but received no clear response.

## **11. Question and Answer session with the attending Councillor, Cllr Rose**

- 11.1 Cllr Rose commented on the allocation of community grants at the SCNP meeting. He would like to see greater participation in the process, with more applications and more people involved in deciding who is funded. Leith had trialled a scheme called Leith Decides which had successfully involved more people.
- 11.2 He recognised the problems with overflowing bins, refuse not being collected and so on. People with concerns about any of these things should contact him with details if they are not getting satisfaction via the formal channels.
- 11.3 Cllr Rose confirmed that he would check progress on the Odeon inspection, investigate the basis of the 25% affordable housing requirement/level playing field issue, and also enquire about the future of the Middle Meadow Walk lavatories.

## **12. Any other business**

- 12.1 The Chair offered batches of Southside Association leaflets for members to take away and distribute in shops, GP surgeries and so on. It's important for the Southside Association to attract new members.
- 12.2 The Chair gave notice of the AGM in May. She would not be standing again as Chair and asked for members to consider whether or not they could stand for office. Many members had already been in office and new members were needed to take on these tasks.
- 12.2 Stephen Carter referred to the two Council consultations soon to be launched – one on Student Housing (16-24 March) and one on HMO Licensing (dates tbc) – and to the offer, made by Prof Jeffery at the February meeting of an Open Meeting to discuss these issues. He offered to work with Moira Gibson to arrange the Open Meeting.

## **13. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 7 April in the Southside Community Centre at 7pm as usual. We hope to have a speaker from the Royal College of Surgeons.