

Tram Meeting Attempts to 'Gag Press'

☒ The workshops designed to create suggestions from residents, traders and indeed any other interested parties, as to how the effects of the tram project can be solved, started this week. But they almost finished before they had begun when a small point amongst the proposed 'rules' was seized on by Council officers present to observe and support the process.

During the first workshop on Tuesday of this week at the City Chambers, residents objecting to the tram project, traders from Shandwick Place and nearby streets concerned at the apparent 20 per cent fall-off in footfall in the area and interested members of the general public were all amazed when a routine observation turned into a time-consuming wrangle.

The meeting had not even reached the stage of nominees being voted on to form the workshops themselves, when a routine remark from the Chair that the workshops were Public Meetings and open to the press was seized upon by Council Officials in a group headed by Tram Co-ordination chief, Andy Conway.

Some of those objectors present say that he intervened to argue against any media being allowed to report the meetings and even threatened that CEC/**tie** would withdraw their support for the meetings if the press were to be allowed in.

In response there were a number of people who accused Mr Conway, and the Council and **tie**, of not being transparent and more interested in obstructing the access to various documents, promised but still not supplied, and stifling debate rather than promoting it.

But this single uncontroversial non-item took so much time that tram objectors feared the Workshop was in danger of being

left with no time to even finish the provisional agenda, let alone move onto the point of the whole session. The workshop was set up with the objective of trying to examine the reasons for the controversial decision to close Shandwick Place and to suggest solutions to the range of problems which the objectors claim this has created.

However the overwhelming vote of those present ensured that the meeting got back on track and was able to move forward constructively.

New Town resident and former civil engineer, Alistair Laing, was present at the workshop. He said:-““At first I was quite stunned to see what we used to call a public servant stand up and advocate banning the press from reporting on a meeting of ordinary people discussing a Light Rail transport system in a room in Edinburgh. But later I realised it’s just another of the various stratagems they have used to do anything in their power to avoid any sort of free and open discussion.”

Another New Town resident – who has been involved in the tram objections and in particular in connection with the increase of emissions in Great Stuart Street among others – Allan Alstead said:-“What can I say? It must be obvious that a Public meeting from which the Press are barred is not a public meeting but a closed meeting, and what will they do next ? Get people to agree not to say a word to anyone about what went on, and then send in a police squad if one of us starts a discussion in the Pub?

“Justice has not only to be done but it has to be seen to be done and at the end of the day we are talking here about a Light Rail system, not vital State secrets. It’s deeply disappointing that the Council still feel they are unable to talk clearly and openly about a project of this sort and they cannot be surprised when people seeing a cover-up keep wondering what it is they have to hide.

“Ordinary people are working very hard to try and get the documents the council offered to provide and then haven’t, so we can analyse the way decisions were arrived at from the very first moment. Only this way can we understand for the first time how this all came about – a bottomless pit into which money has been thrown, a tram system that makes the air worse for over 250,000 people across the City by 2026, a project where the Council created company and the contractors end up at each other’s throats.”