

Leith Central Community Council News

by Ross Doyle

After the shock and sudden passing of the council's former chairperson Stewart Blaik, it was an emotional start to November's Leith Central Community Council meeting, held at McDonald Road Library.

Some heart-felt tributes were paid to Mr Blaik, simply summed up as "a man of the people" by one of the meeting's attendees, and as an important member of the community. He was best known for being both the chair of this council group as well as being a member of the Leith Neighbourhood Partnership, and a member of the Labour Party and trade unions for over 50 years.

Rightfully as top of the meeting's agenda, discussions focussed on establishing an annual, or biannual, memorial or celebration day to commemorate the life of such a well loved member of the community. His charitable links with Alzheimer's Scotland also resulted in the decision to donate £100 of the council's budget to the charity on his behalf.

The next item on the minutes was a quick update on safety and crime issues in the local area. The police officer was able to assure the members of the group that recent unsavoury incidents between youths in the Bonnington Area and local shopkeepers are under control and there is an improvement and reduction on mobile phone thefts which had previously been quite frequent.

There are also going to be increased efforts to improve road safety at night after a woman was seriously injured by a car turning onto Dalmeny Road.

The main discussions during this meeting related to a housing development in the Bonnington Area which will result in the relocation of James Blake & Co to another location outside of the city. The industrial company who currently occupy the land, will be relocated as the majority of the area will be used in phase one of the new development. The company has experienced tough financial times during the recent recession with their staff numbers being cut from over 90 to around 40.

Representatives of the P2 partnership presenting the plans for the development, which will consist of 220 flats of varying rental values, said that this move would benefit both the local area and the future operation of 'Blake's.' There is likely to be more to come from these developments in the recent future as the plans are still at an early stage, however this was still enough to stimulate a fairly heated discussion on the matter.

Many were critical of the appearance of the new housing, while some were also concerned by the six storey height causing over shadowing of nearby buildings. The representatives made assurances of the depth of research involved in these plans and they would be aiming to provide the most efficient solution. The plans were said to be revolutionary in their aims to focus on obtaining resident employed in the public sector and in charitable organisations.

The next part of the meeting discussed the Greener Leith and Pedal project looking to raise £80,000 through a nationwide competition to fund a community wind turbine. As only one of two Scottish entries, the project which would serve Portobello, Leith and Craigtinny areas is still in the running currently in second in the voting list. A representative of the project encouraged people to continue voting with the deadline on 3 December this year.

There are also plans to award £3,000 to the most improved shop front on Leith Walk in an effort to rejuvenate the area. With plans to build part of the trams network along the area now scrapped, other schemes are now being devised to try and encourage economic interest.

A final point was made about transport in Edinburgh, with Lothian Buses, who operate Edinburgh Tours, being awarded five stars by Visit Scotland. With over 500,000 people a year using the service the highly prestigious award was considered to be a huge privilege by the council members.

The next meeting will take place on December 12th at 7:30 in the McDonald Road Library.