

Five things you need to know today



Princes Mall – Welfare Reform (Further Provision) (Scotland) Bill – Edinburgh Youth Issues Forum – CRAGS RE-LAUNCH GREAT FOR THE COMMUNITY – Dean Owens

The shopping development at Princes Mall may yet be handed over to the tenants for a few pennies following a decision by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee.

The committee have been discussing the fate of a legal anomaly called Long Leases over recent months. These are leases for 175 years, and which have more than 100 years left to run. The committee has decided they should no longer exist, and that these leases should be converted into a normal form of land ownership.

The owners of Princes Mall, PPG which is a company owned by Sir David Murray, could now own the shopping centre for payment of a little over 40p which will be paid for the transfer of ownership. The company paid £37m to the former tenants in 2004, to acquire the buildings comprising the shopping development, but they are only tenants of the land itself. The site is owned by The City of Edinburgh Council, to whom they pay 1p a year in rent.

Despite attempts to exempt the land from the effect of these legislative changes, the council will probably receive nothing for it. It has been argued that the land is held for the 'common good', and that a special exemption ought to have been made so that the council did not lose a capital asset for no gain.

In February 2012, Green Councillor Alison Johnstone (who is also an MSP) tabled the following motion to the Edinburgh Council meeting on 2 February 2012:-

“That the Council:

Notes that The Scottish Government has re-introduced its Long Leases Bill which fell in the last session of Parliament when it ran out of time.

The City of Edinburgh Council 2 February 2012

“Notes that the Bill is designed to automatically convert leases of over 175 years with at least 100 years to run into full ownership.

Notes that Waverley Market is currently leased for 1p per year on a 206 year lease which expires in 2188.

Agrees to write to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee of the Scottish Parliament seeking an exemption for this site on the grounds that this multi million pound asset belongs to the people of Edinburgh and should not be lost to future residents for the price of a few pennies.”

Decision

- 1. 1) To approve the motion by Councillor Johnstone.*
- 2. 2) To agree that the letter referred to in the final paragraph of the motion be informed by previous correspondence to the Justice Committee on this matter and that the draft should be shared with Group Leaders prior to issue.”*

It would appear that the council’s attempts have been in vain.

On these matters, the Committee Convener said: “Our Committee is not persuaded by the arguments made thus far to exempt ultra-long leases on common good land.

“In terms of Princes Mall, it was not for the Committee to

decide whether or not this site is part of Edinburgh's common good assets and on the question of making a specific exemption for this site, the committee believes the argument has yet to be made."

The Bill is scheduled to have concluded Stage 1 scrutiny at The Scottish Parliament by 27 April 2012.

The Scottish Government want you to have your say on the new welfare regime which is to be put into effect. You have until 11 April 2012 to respond to the consultation if this will affect you. **How Scotland implements the UK Welfare Reform Act is back under the spotlight as the Scottish Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee has asked for comments on the general principles of the Scottish Government's [Welfare Reform \(Further Provision\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#).**

In December 2011, the Scottish Parliament voted to take responsibility for welfare matters over which it has power, rather than agreeing for these to be passed by the Westminster Parliament.

[The Welfare Reform \(Further Provision\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) proposes that the Scottish Government be given powers to introduce regulations under the UK Welfare Reform Act and amend other Scottish legislation that relates to it.

Committee Convener [Michael McMahon MSP](#) said: "The aim of this legislation is to ensure Scotland can put in place all the necessary arrangements well before the deadline for the introduction of the new welfare system on 1 April 2013.

"This is the date on which the current benefits system begins to end. New arrangements must be in place for benefits such as for housing and also for 'passported' benefits such as disabled parking badges and concessionary travel.

“We are asking people to let us know what they think about how the Scottish Government is planning to bring about the changes required.

“Our Committee is keen to make sure that this Bill receives proper scrutiny, despite its rapid timetable.

“We only have a few weeks to gather evidence. I would encourage all those involved in representing those receiving welfare and people affected by the proposed changes to let us know what they think as soon as possible.”

The Committee is seeking views on the general principles of the bill and specifically on the universal credit and personal independence payments.

Here is a Q & A session on the bill

The Edinburgh Youth Issues Forum meets tonight at the City Chambers at 5.30p.m. One of the reports to be submitted to this meeting, and which is worth reading, is the report from the Budget Youth Summit held in January when the group were consulted about the council's budget proposals, and asked for their ideas. Some very good ideas here. Read down to the end where all the ideas are listed..

[Item 9 Budget Youth Summit-2](#)

An event celebrating the re-launch of the Crags Community Sports Centre was held just at the end of last week.

Re-opened in January, the Centre has been given a new lease of life as a charitable organisation, led by Boroughmuir Blaze Basketball Club, basketballscotland and Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association. The centre was previously operated by Edinburgh Leisure but was forced to close in late 2010 as a result of budget cuts to the arms-length council body.

Speaking following the event, Sarah Boyack MSP said:

“Ever since the Crags closed there have been talks to find a

way to bring it back so it is great to see the centre given a new lease of life. I know that the group behind the project have been working extremely hard to engage with the local community and I'm delighted that they are already receiving bookings from local groups including schools and the Canongate Youth Project.

"The new centre is a real boost to the area and particularly for young people. Alongside the obvious health and fitness benefits, the community campaigned to build the Centre to give young people opportunities locally. The Craggs was credited with reducing youth disorder by providing initiatives for young people and I hope to see similar initiatives taken forward this summer. Now that the centre is open it's important for the community to get behind it by using the facilities."

Dean Owens is frae Leith, and he has a new album out today!