

Is Leith getting back on track?



Following the disappointment when they realised that the new tramline would not be coming to Leith (at least not yet), business people in the area soon realised that they had to do something to help themselves if they want their firms in the area to thrive.

Now the Leith Business Association are turning their attention to Ocean Terminal, partly a shopping centre, but also the first place that cruise passengers see when they arrive in the capital by sea. Cruise ship numbers are expected to rise this year from 60-80,000 according to the statistics provided by [Cruise Europe](#). But out of those the passengers who will travel through ports owned or run by Forth Ports plc this year are said by the company to number only about 20,000.. No matter what the figures, LBA believe that growth can only be sustained through improving the offering at Ocean Terminal. Alex Wilson of LBA said that he believes that the Cruise Ship industry, based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida would love to increase visitors numbers to Leith/Edinburgh but have reservations about the depressing and dire state of the arrivals area within the port.

The [Cruise Edinburgh](#) website, which is endorsed by The City of Edinburgh Council, Forth Ports plc and VisitScotland says about the port:-“Compact but rich in experiences, Edinburgh was recently voted ‘Best UK Port of Call’.”

This statement does not entirely square with the views of Leith Business Association who think the port is a bit of a backwater, and a bit of a disappointing entry point to the city. The LBA is throwing down the gauntlet to The City of

Edinburgh Council to help do something about the condition of Ocean Terminal ahead of the cruising season which gets started in April.

The LBA are holding their usual monthly meeting tomorrow evening at McDonald Road Library at 5:45 pm to discuss their proposals for dressing up Ocean Terminal to make it more attractive for arriving passengers. Part of the submission to the City contains several promotional aspects which can and will tie in with Marketing Leith, the name of a new Project Group just set up. Jonny Kane of Roseleaf Bar Cafe on Sandport Street has taken up the role of Project Leader for the new group, and the inaugural meeting has already been held to work out a way forward.

Chair of LBA, Alex Wilson, told The Edinburgh Reporter:-" The future of Leith now lies in its past and how we promote ourselves lies in Leithers' hands. All the great plans for Leith such as trams have fallen by the wayside. We recognise that our intrinsic strengths are our history, and we aim to build on that."



A spokesman for Forth Ports said:-"A large number of cruise passengers pass through the Port of Leith each year, bringing investment to the whole Edinburgh area, and we're proud to be able to facilitate this tourism boost. Forth Ports has received many plaudits about the warmth of the reception received by cruise lines and passengers alike when they visit Edinburgh. We are looking at upgrading our cruise terminal facilities in Leith and would welcome any initiative that helps attract visitors to the area."

Transport Convener, Councillor Lesley Hinds, said:-"We realise there is a lot of competition from other cities, but we hope that we can have constructive discussions with Forth Ports Authority on how we can make it more attractive. It is very important to the city and it is also essential to have a lot of information to give to the cruise passengers about the capital. We have an excellent bus service to and from Ocean Terminal in the Number 22 service. Trams would of course have made the transport easy, but the bus service is certainly very

convenient for arriving cruise passengers. The promotion of the city must include Leith, and we welcome Leith Business Association's moves in that direction."

Councillor Deidre Brock SNP councillor for Leith Walk said that she loved the sense of history in Leith when she first arrived in Scotland, and lived in Henderson Street. She said:- "I will look forward to hearing the detailed plans at the LBA meeting, but will welcome anything that attracts visitors to stay in Leith as there is so much to see and do here. I am passionate about Leith and fascinated by the history of the area which includes land owned by the Knights Templar. We must get the cruise passengers to make the most of their visit. Some of my own family arrived in Leith on a cruise ship last year and were only here for a few hours, while others go off for tours of the Highlands. We should be doing all we can to keep people in Leith and in Edinburgh and anything we can do to encourage cruise visitors is a good thing."

Mike Hall, Head of Marketing at Cruise and Maritime Voyages who use Leith regularly said :- "With its close proximity to Edinburgh, Leith provides a convenient departure port for those living in the East of Scotland. Our passenger questionnaires tell us that a convenient departure port is a deciding factor when booking a cruising holiday with CMV. Any improvements to the port and its facilities can only enhance passenger experience and ensure future growth."

Paul Foster who works with CMV on their PR said:- "I see Leith as a departure point and a place to visit. Leith needs to remain in a competitive environment because in 2012 there were 52 ports visited by cruise ships and Ex-UK cruising continues to grow with a sizeable increase. For CMV there is a choice:- There will be six Leith departures this year on Marco Polo, and next year Discovery will cruise from here in the main Summer season four times. But we should all remember we are in a world market competing with every port in the world for business."

[The Cruise Edinburgh website shows a photograph of a tram](#) next to a cruise ship. This is perhaps a little misleading given

that the tram line will stop at York Place, and at least for the meantime, will not proceed down Leith Walk which was for so long a maze of roadworks in anticipation of a tram running up and down it.

Leith Walk is to be reinstated. There are two parts to the reinstatement:- first of all there is a snagging list connected with works done to the utilities and secondly there is a programme of work to be undertaken for which £5.5m has been set aside. That programme might include some improvements such as segregated cycle lanes and pavements of uniform width, but the details have still to be finalised, and Leith Business Association were very much involved in that discussion too. They were invited to a meeting in the City Chambers last week to review the findings of the consultation ahead of the plans being made public.

So Leith Business Association appear to be taking matters into their own hands to ensure that Leith gets firmly back on track.

LBA meets at McDonald Road Library at 5:45pm Wednesday 6 March 2013.



Updated 6 March 2013 with quote from Forth Ports.

Updated 7 March with figure from Cruise Europe. <http://www.cruiseurope.com/statistics?order=title&sort=desc>