

# Edinburgh Councillor blogs – Councillor Jim Orr



by Councillor Jim Orr who is the Independent councillor for Southside Newington Ward

One of the most interesting areas of the Southside Newington Ward is Dumbiedykes. Historically a council estate, it now seems to have at least as many private properties as council ones. The area has its challenges too, so much so that one of the four priorities of the current Local Community Plan for the whole south Central Neighbourhood is to “[Improve the quality of life in Dumbiedykes](#)”.

But engaging with the local community as a whole has always been a challenge in itself. We, the council, set up a quarterly Quality of Life Group and we regularly get the police, community safety officers and many other stakeholders along to it. But publicising it has been difficult and very few locals come along, even though it’s open to all.

Partly in response to this I started councillor surgeries at the Braidwood Centre, but in all the many months that it ran not one person came along.

Thankfully, it looks like that disconnect is going to change. At the Braidwood Centre last night there were about fifty residents present for the third meeting of the new residents association – the biggest yet. The felling of trees in February for the planned bike park was the catalyst for the creation of the association.

There are many differing opinions about the bike park (for, against and unsure), but everyone at the meeting want to make

sure that the voice of the community will be heard loud and clear from now on. A delegate was also elected to represent the association at the (also new) Community Council.

Parking is probably the biggest problem on the estate. Smart Parking Ltd gave the council 30 days notice last April that they were pulling out of managing parking in the area meaning that the estate would have no controlled parking. This has gradually escalated into a massive problem as Joe Public became aware of the giant free car park just off the Old Town that is Dumbiedykes.

Solving this will not be easy – any parking solution will need a long and complex consultation and there will likely be a cost to residents– but at least we can start the process. Some might say that it shouldn't need such a loud expression of community anger to get things started, but I'm just glad that we have such a voice to respond to at last, so that we know what the priorities are and the difference between what's desirable and what's essential.

Bus provision is another big problem. The number 60 was brought in on a subsidised basis a couple of years ago mainly as there was no direct link to the amenities of the Southside such as the shops and the doctors surgery, but that one will stop running in June and the next step will be to look at diverting existing services to Holyrood Road and the Southside. We're meeting Lothian Buses soon and we'll just have to see how we get on with them on that one.

Dog dirt is another issue on the estate. Residents reported that it's often members of the local community themselves who are guilty of failing to pick up after their own dog. In this respect there are similar problems elsewhere in the city.

Although last night there were even reports of people leaving dog mess on the stairs of the blocks of flats. There are measures that can be taken to improve behaviour and hopefully

community pride and spirit will prevail and the miscreants will stop leaving dog dirt for others to deal with.

The Southside is definitely on the up with the old Odeon currently under refurbishment and new many features such as the mural and cycleway at Gifford Park. I'd say Dumbiedykes is on the up too.

There is money to spend on valuable community projects via the "Spirit of Dumbiedykes" fund, and more money for the area from the councils HRA (Housing Revenue Account) pot will be up for grabs at the South Central Decides meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April at the Methodist Hall in Nicholson Square.

Given the community spirit now on show at the residents association, there is bound to be a good turnout from the estate.