

Edinburgh councillor blogs – Cllr Gavin Barrie Economy Convener



SNP Councillor Gavin Barrie is Economy Convener. He took over this position after Councillor Frank Ross was elected Group Leader in March last year.

Ahead of tomorrow's budget meeting at the City Chambers he explained to us the focus of his portfolio, and the way it affects the whole city and the council's finances.

“Demand for services continues to rise as Edinburgh's demographic makeup changes, with the city rapidly expanding and a growing aging population. These changes are happening at a time of unprecedented tight financial constraints.

“As Economy Convener my focus continues to be making best use of Council resources to boost Edinburgh's economy wherever we can.

“Making more efficient use of our buildings is a high priority for us and brings benefits to the Council as well as local businesses and organisations. Using and running our buildings more efficiently has large potential budgetary savings for the Council. The benefits of leasing and selling our buildings in a managed and responsible way was demonstrated at Economy Committee this week as a decision was taken to lease Lothian Chambers to the French Consulate and 329 High Street to The Chris Stewart Group.

“These deals are perfect examples of achieving economic efficiency and a win win situation. Every year the Council will now save £173,000 in revenue for Lothian Chambers and 329 High Street. The French Consulate will gain access to the

famous B-listed Lothian Chambers and the Chris Stewart Group will carry out a high standard conversion of the 329 High Street building to create serviced apartments.

“Maximising the use of buildings such as these, relocating staff and services efficiently and making considerable savings on running costs makes absolute sense to me.

“Council staff and services at the Lothian Chambers and 329 High Street will be relocated to nearby premises with registry services continuing to be available within the City Chambers.

“The French Consulate will now give the Lothian Chambers a new lease of life and provide residents and visitors with fantastic opportunities to enjoy public access to the property.

“The plans are very impressive and include a 100-seat auditorium, featuring an extensive programme of theatre, music, dance and artist residencies that aim to support as well as showcase performances from Scottish, French and international artists. A multimedia library, cafe, art gallery, Scotland Centre for Photography, and French and European language school will also be provided. If you want to tie the knot there don't worry as they also plan to provide continued space rental for receptions, weddings and civic occasions.

“Add to this the serviced apartments which will shortly available at 329 High Street and you can see how some creative thinking can benefit the city as well as saving much needed resources to provide vital services.

“It is also important to highlight that in undertaking creative solutions for buildings, the Council remains committed to protecting the heritage of buildings. The Council has leased Lothian Chamber and 329 High Street so we can maintain an interest in the functions and quality of these buildings, which are key historic features of our Old Town UNESCO World Heritage site.”

The Council meets on Thursday 9 February to discuss the budget for the coming year, which will be set within the four year framework they set last year. The council papers are [here](#) and you can view the meeting online [here](#).