

Council Elections 2017 – Alex Lunn Craigentinny/Duddingston – SNP candidate



Alex Lunn is one of the three existing councillors for Craigentinny/Duddingston Ward and he is standing again as an SNP candidate in May 2017.

We spoke to him about what he thinks his achievements have been and what he feels the next administration can and should do.

You can either listen to this interview or read it below.

TER : Alex when you started off your life as a councillor you were actually a Labour councillor and you jumped ship!

AL : Yes how could I forget!

TER : And you are now standing again as an SNP candidate. What are the main things you are campaigning for here?

AL : My focus has never really changed. From a national point of view I want what's best for Scotland and I want what's best for Edinburgh which obviously is not the way I see that things are currently going in the United Kingdom and they haven't been going that way for a long time.

In terms of the local issues of my ward I have actually had a fantastic five years. I have got so much done. There's a new nursery school at Duddingston which I led the campaign on, the redevelopment of Portobello I was also heavily involved in as were several other councillors

There has also been a lot of big successes as well like changing Council planning policy before I was a Vice Convener when we got a street named after Lawrie Reilly. That was fantastic. I absolutely loved being involved in that.

TER : You had to change the law to do that?

AL : It certainly had to change planning policy! I felt at the time the officers were being very uncooperative and did not seem to get the point that I and the local community were making. Whether you're a football fan, a Hearts fan, a Hibs fan, a Rangers fan, a Celtic fan or an Aberdeen fan Easter Road and Hibernian Football Club are central to that area.

Now I'm a Jambo. Everybody knows that. I wear my heart quite literally on my sleeve, but Lawrie Reilly is a hero to the people of Edinburgh. He was a folk hero and that is why I wanted the new street right next to Easter Road named after him. Planning officers at the time were not overly cooperative.

I did offer them compromises including naming a street after the other Famous Five forward Willie Ormond, which they declined, and so I just changed the policy on them.

TER : At one point you were Vice Convener of Communities and Neighbourhoods and now what is your role?

AL : I am Vice Convenor of Planning.

TER : Which has been more fulfilling?

AL : Well I've got to say at this at this moment in time the communities and neighbourhoods Vice-convenership was excellent. Not only did I get to help with modernising local community media but, (and here's the thing I'm really proud of), I was able to set up two things as Vice-Convener, one I was able to actually get a food bank working group off the ground, which and which is now chaired by my successor

Councillor Lewis Ritchie.

That has done a lot of fantastic work. The other thing, the thing I got political heat for from certain sections of the community, I got Edinburgh to join the Syrian vulnerable peoples relocation programme.

I am so proud of that. I have met several Syrians who have come to Edinburgh and they are just so delighted to be here. It is a new life for them and they want they want to be part of Edinburgh.

TER : How many people has Edinburgh welcomed now?

AL : Well when I was Vice-Convener we were aiming for 100 and I am hoping that the number has gone up. I haven't checked recently but that is on my list of things to do. Now that I am vice-convenor of planning my diary has really filled up! I have a weekly meeting with Councillor Ian Perry, the Convenor and the planning leadership of the City Chambers. We meet at 9 AM every Tuesday to discuss the various issues.

TER : Where do you think are the city could go from here? There is always conflict between greenbelt and brownfield sites. What's your view?

AL : We need houses, we need jobs and we need investment and we need to relieve the pressure that there is currently in the houses of multiple occupancy, the HMO market.

We have to relieve that pressure as well.

TER : Do you mean there are too many of those?

AL : Yes Edinburgh has become such an expensive place to live that it is not only students who live in houses of multiple occupancy. It's young professionals and young people who work in retail and say in the service industry who are living in houses of multiple occupancy because Edinburgh has just become so expensive.

In terms of my political beliefs I am somewhere to the left of Marx but the system and the capitalist system is all about supply economics and the supply of housing has not been strong enough in Edinburgh in the last ten years.

There are reasons for that most of them external but it is something that we have to get a hand on.

TER : But the council has just recently, just within the last year said that it is going to build 16,000 affordable homes over the next 10 years.

AL : Correct.

TER : So is that not enough?

AL : I think to be honest we need to start getting some of these houses built and then we will know where we are going with the housing, but until we start actually seeing them built then the waiting list will continue to get worse.

TER : Haven't they already started? Haven't we seen new 21st-Century Homes in Muirhouse and other places?

AL : Yes but it is not enough. That is the point I am making. We have turned a corner but by turning the corner we are only at the end of a very long road.

We have a lot of work to do. We are making the right policy decisions and the housing market and the developers are now looking to work with us so we've turned the corner, so what happens and how far down the road we get is another matter.

Am I concerned about the impact of Brexit on the potential of the housing market in the next ten years? Yes I am very concerned about that.

TER : If you get re-elected what are you going to make your priorities in the local area?

AL : For the local area I will be looking to get more investment in our schools.

I feel good about the work I have done in schools in the last five years.

Obviously the highlight was the Duddingston nursery. We've also had investment in Parsons Green Primary School, Royal High Primary School Saint Ninians, Craigentinny.

I will be fighting for more of that I will also be making the case for more nursery placement at the other schools as well.

I will also be fighting hard to get more of the schools in my ward into the school road closure scheme.

Currently Duddingston and St John's have benefited from that; making it safer trying to change the attitude of parents when they are taking and dropping off their kids at school.

I want to see more of the schools in my ward added to the list of schools on that scheme. I will be fighting very hard for that.

Of course the uphill battle really has been on dog dirt though sadly. It is now an education matter to be honest with you.

I holiday in America and I don't recall seeing a bit of dog dirt in America, and that is true wherever I have been. That's because the Americans pick up, and if they don't pick up they get a whopping fine.

We need to see that here, but definitely an educational element as well. And of course it is not just dog dirt we still have periodic problems with littering. High school kids have got better although I am under no illusions we will ever solve that!

The candidates in the Craigentinny/Duddingston Ward are as follows:

Ian Campbell SNP

Joan Griffiths Scottish Labour Party

Patrick Hadfield Scottish Liberal Democrats

Alex Lunn SNP

John McLellan Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

Lyndsay Martin Scottish Labour & Cooperative Party

Alex Staniforth Scottish Green Party

Mridul Wadhwa SNP