

Council grant funding for some town centre projects

Five projects will benefit from Edinburgh Council's Town Centre Fund. These are Gracemount public realm, Craigmillar town centre, Westside Plaza Phase 3, Granton Station, Pentlands Community Space and Pennywell Hub which have all been chosen to receive a share of the £1.454 million which is allocated.

The funding for these local projects was passed at today's full council meeting. The money is part of a Scottish Government fund of £3.567 million of total investment that The City of Edinburgh Council received, over two rounds. The funding seeks to drive local economic activity and invest in inclusive growth which supports town centres to become more diverse and sustainable, creating more vibrant, creative, enterprising and accessible places for their communities.

Ben Macpherson MSP said: "The £747,000 investment for the Granton Station project will create a new destination in the heart of North Edinburgh for locals and visitors alike, and is an exciting aspect of the wider Waterfront development."

Edinburgh Pentlands MSP, Gordon MacDonald, was also delighted to see "two brilliant local projects in Edinburgh Pentlands

receiving the backing they need to take them another step closer to becoming a reality" as Westside Plaza Phase 3 and Pentlands Community Space were confirmed as they received £300,000 and £75,000 respectively.

The projects also include the Craigmillar town centre project and their bid for £170,000. This funding will support them to turn a vacant site in the heart of the Craigmillar regeneration area into a hub for the local community and provide spaces for new and existing businesses.

Edinburgh East MP, Tommy Sheppard, said: "This is an imaginative project that can help stimulate business in Craigmillar in a way that works with the grain of social distancing. It's the kind of smart, targeted investment we need to bounce back from the pandemic."

One project which did not get funding was the Corstorphine Community Centre which was destroyed by fire some years ago. Lord Provost Frank Ross is a trustee with the charity and consequently did not take part in the vote.

He said after the meeting: "I repeat the comment that I made at the recent Housing committee meeting. This approach to fund so many public realm works is promoting "Pavements over People." Nice pavements don't help people in need. Community council facilities which are the base for providing services do."

Some of the opposition parties supported funding for Corstorphine Community Centre. Councillor Jim Campbell said that he understood the committee had agreed that any underspend from the first round would go to the Corstorphine Community Centre.

Cllr Robert Aldridge said: "Time and again the Corstorphine Community Centre has been told they would be first in line for any underspend. It might be best if the administration told the centre that they have an idea not to spend the money there

because of some inverted snobbery. I think they have been treated particularly unfairly by this council. If any other community had put a quarter of the work in to getting the centre rebuilt I am sure it would have been funded.”

Councillor Graham Hutchison said: “It has already been said that the treatment has been absolutely shoddy by this council and this administration. It is now almost a year since I was first approached by the Community Centre as a member of Finance and Resources. I have taken the time to go and visit, I’ve spoken with the committee there and I can absolutely see the merits of this fantastic project. There have been promises made by councillors and we are once again failing to deliver.”

Convener of Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work, Cllr Kate Campbell, pointed out that this funding is time-limited and it is disappointing that the report had been referred to the full council meeting. She said: “We know that the impact on businesses from the pandemic has been especially hard, and that jobs and livelihoods are at risk. It’s important that we are doing everything we can to boost economic activity in our town centres so this allocation of additional funding to the Town Centre fund could not have come at a better time.

“We’re investing in public realm in areas of the city that we know have high levels of poverty. These are communities that need this investment.

“Most of these projects focus on transforming public realm. At Granton and Craigmillar this is going further, and creating a space that can be used for outdoor markets and pop up food and drink stalls.

“I’m really pleased that we are creating economic opportunities in the communities that will really feel the benefit. It’s about quality of life – creating public space that is safe, well designed, pedestrian and cycle friendly, and a place that people want to be. When we create spaces like

this, we encourage people to use their local town centres in a way that's good for the community and good for local businesses.

“The other benefit of these projects is that they all involve construction – so at the same time as benefiting communities, and improving public space, we're also creating jobs at a time when they are desperately needed.”