

Council elections 2022 – Andy Mackenzie – Leith ward

Name – Andy Mackenzie

Political Party – Independent

Ward – Leith

What's your story?

I live on Constitution St with my wife and two sons. I've been a litter picker, a local arts supporter, urban crofter, business advocate, secretary of my kids' primary school parent council in Leith, sports coach, general helper, and latterly the community engagement officer of the Leith Franklin Academical Beige cricket club.

I've been in and around Edinburgh off and on since 1976, and I've lived in Leith for 15 years.

I love it here, always have, but I'm hacked off with how some things work in this city, and how some things don't.

I'm a newspaper journalist to trade (my first full-time job was on the Kilburn Times), these days I am a freelancing editor on newspapers, magazines and books, and an occasional writer. The last time I signed a full-time contract of employment with company pension contributions was in 1986, with Robert Maxwell, and it kind of put me off.

I am used to asking questions, and have plenty to ask our city council and its officials on behalf of our local communities. And I have some suggestions to make.

An elected member of Leith Links Community Council for the last six years, leading on planning issues, I am only too

familiar with the frustrations so many of us feel when we try to have our voices heard and our views properly addressed by the city council. Which is why I feel the area needs a non-party political councillor fighting for its interests at a granular level on the ground.

I think party politics is a waste of energy and resources much of the time, at the local authority level, and believe that Edinburgh and Leith would benefit from a more independent perspective and pragmatic approach, which I would aim to provide. Along with a hyper-local focus on our streets and parks and public realm.

What are your concerns?

Much better community engagement/consultation/empowerment is needed. Over everything the council does that will have an impact on our communities.

Joined-up Thinking. Between different departments of the council, for sure. And a reset of relations between councillors and council officials, and between the city and its citizens.

Housing: Amid a construction mini-boom in our ward, particularly along the waterfront, we are not getting enough social and affordable housing, and there is widespread concern about the impact this huge wave of new-build development will have on the amenity and functionality of our existing neighbourhoods. Developer contributions should be collected in full – currently only 60% of these Section 75 payments are in-gathered by the council, which is absurd – and reinvested in local infrastructure and amenity.

2. In and around Leith Links there is a dense concentration of temporary accommodation, much of it in the hands of one significant landlord group, in an area which the council acknowledges already has an overprovision of

such establishments. If we can't stop this group's relentless expansion and acquisition through planning, then we need to think about how it can be better regulated and monitored, so that it does not further destabilise what is a socially and ethnically diverse, cohesive and vibrant community in the heart of the Leith Conservation Area.

Tram: Our ward has suffered a great deal of disruption and stress over the duration of the tramworks, the first time round and also during the current extension to Newhaven. Now is not the time to impose additional huge change and disruption in this area through the imposition of a Controlled Parking Zone and Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN), which the council intends to implement this coming September.

I'm not against LTNs per se, although the jury is still out on their impacts, and I'm very much in favour of 'active travel', but such a massive change should only be implemented when the tram is much closer to operation (currently scheduled for next spring), and the bus routes have been restored in a fully integrated public transport network.

I will be asking for the LTN/CPZ proposals for our ward to be paused until the tram is nearer completion, and reviewed in the meantime. This review might include further consideration of the pedestrianisation of The Shore. The prospect of our neighbourhood being effectively cut off in September as we go into next winter is a bleak one, with no real guarantee that the tram will begin operation on schedule, despite what the tram team and council say.

From the Seafield water treatment works at the eastern edge of our ward – on which Leith Links CC has been leading to demand improvement on a long-standing local blight – to the rainbow 'Pride Bridge' by Newhaven which the council has tried and failed to close, unnecessarily, at the western edge of the ward – there are so many elements of our public realm that

need care and attention and better management.

Tell us something we may not know about you

I once played a small but pivotal role in the political downfall of Margaret Thatcher and drove Oliver Reed to Peebles. Although not on the same day.

Mr Mackenzie will issue his full manifesto and details of his social media platform next week, after Easter.

