

Council Elections 2022 – Steve Burgess – Southside/Newington

Steve Burgess

Scottish Greens

Southside-Newington

What is your story?

Edinburgh born and bred, a former post-doctoral medical researcher and Greenpeace campaigner, I now have a young family. Before becoming a Green Councillor I worked in the Scottish Parliament for eight years, including as Head of Policy for a group of seven Green MSPs.

I was first elected as a councillor in 2007 when a fairer, proportional voting system came in that meant people who voted Green could be represented on the council. Before that the antiquated first-past-the-post system meant that only the candidate that got the most votes would be elected, leaving anyone who didn't vote for that party unrepresented on the council. Now we have larger wards represented by three or four councillors from different parties. This gives people far better representation with a wider range of parties on the council.

When first I stood in 2007, we didn't know if any Greens would get elected at all but we were very keen to put Green candidates on the ballot paper to give people the chance to vote Green. In the end Alison Johnstone, Maggie Chapman and myself were elected as the first three Greens. It was an exciting time and I have to say a pretty steep learning curve! Standing for the council election wasn't really on my

radar before 2007 but I was very aware there was a huge job to be done to make the city greener and fairer and I was up for that.

As a councillor since 2007 I've held a variety of roles including Co-convenor of the Green Group and as a member of Education, Transport-Environment, Housing and Planning committees.

Over the years I've proposed some other major initiatives at the council including the tourist tax, 20mph limits, Park Green (linking parking charges to CO2-emissions) a Low Emission Zone and licensing of short-term holiday lets.

At ward level, I've actively contributed to community initiatives; a bike-skills track for young people, new community allotments, rights of way across the Astley Ainslie hospital site and 'Playing Out' for kids on local streets. I've also helped hundreds of residents with individual challenges from missed bin collections to homelessness.

What are the main issues you will campaign on – both as a party and personally?

The Scottish Greens have a full manifesto for Edinburgh under the banner 'A Green Edinburgh for Everyone' covering all the major issues for the City from health to housing, education to transport and communities to democracy. Your readers can see our manifesto at www.edinburghgreens. By electing more Green councillors, voters can strengthen the Green voice on the council that will push on all of these issues.

The Greens' priorities and my own top priorities include tackling poverty and reducing the city's climate-changing pollution. As the Poverty and the Climate commissions have said, Edinburgh council has a vital role in leading the Capital on these crucial issues.

What do you consider to be your or your party's achievements

or legacy during the last council session?

As Green Councillor over this Council term, I've been part of a strong team making significant Green gains for Edinburgh. I've led for our group on climate change – formally proposing that the council declare a Climate Emergency and come up with a plan for moving towards a net zero target, both within the council itself and across the City as a whole.

Greens have also been successful in changing council policy on over 80 issues which are documented in our manifesto under 'Our Impact'. The first thing we did after the last election was secure agreement on introducing a Low Emission Zone for the City which is vital if we're going to reduce air pollution from traffic to within safe limits. This term we've also seen the Scottish Government finally agreeing that councils can introduce a tourist levy – something Green councillors first proposed. We've also seen the government grant powers for councils over short-term lets, another Green win. The list goes on and on.

What is the thing that few people would know about you?

Probably that I'm a fairly reluctant politician. I was firstly an environmental campaigner and was employed by the Greens in policy and research work. When the first council elections under a proportional voting system came along in 2007, the party was asking members to put their names on ballot papers not really knowing if anyone would get elected. And here I am 15 years later!

I also am lucky enough to have a sailing dinghy at Portobello and spend much of my spare time mucking about in boats.



Steve Burgess Green Party candidate for Edinburgh North and Leith General Election 2019 PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter