

# Salmond criticises council for destroying businesses with tram works on visit to Leith

Alex Salmond has criticised Edinburgh City Council for “destroying businesses” with tram works as he visited Leith on the campaign trail.

The Alba leader and former First Minister was in the capital ahead of next month’s council elections, which will test the popularity of his new party at a local level for the first time.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Mr Salmond complained that construction of the city’s new tram line delayed his arrival to the event, which was held at Leith Arches on Wednesday.

Asked if he’s paid attention to how the party he previously led, the SNP, have run Edinburgh Council over the last five years, he replied: “I’ve been paying a fair bit of attention today since it took me 35 minutes to get to this venue in about 300 yards.

“Infrastructure’s fantastic but you have to think about the consequences to businesses and local people when you’re doing it.”



Construction of the new tram line to Newhaven commenced in 2019 and has had a significant impact on footfall and income for many businesses around Leith Walk, as limited crossings and a one-way system have restricted access to traders

operating on the street.

During the botched construction of the first line from Edinburgh Airport to York Place in 2011 the then Scottish leader said he regretted the £776 million project going ahead, calling it a “waste of money”.

He added this week: “I think there could have been a lot better for Edinburgh by investing in fuel efficient and hydrogen buses and other alternative plans which I think would have been a lot better.

“[The City of Edinburgh Council] don’t seem to have learned many lessons, you can’t destroy people’s businesses in the process of building infrastructure because when the infrastructure’s finished, the businesses have gone. So I wish they would waken up to a bit of reality.”

He is hopeful that the local elections in two weeks will see Alba councillors voted in in Edinburgh for the first time, saying an electoral breakthrough in the capital would be “good for Edinburgh and good for Scotland”.



The pro-independence party is standing seven candidates across the city, with key manifesto pledges including a council tax freeze, more affordable housing, free school meals for all primary and secondary pupils and the protection of safe spaces

for women.

Mr Salmond said: "We've got some outstanding candidates across Edinburgh so if we can get somebody elected it'll be the first time ever under the Alba banner and that makes it really important, that makes it a significant point in Scottish politics.

"We've heard from council candidates today and they've all got their own key issues for their own locality, here in Leith you only have to try and get to any venue to know what the issues are so they'll hammering away at the issues in their ward, every single one of them.

"But also of course across Scotland is the immediate requirement for independence, every Scot's saying 'how come I've got sky high fuel bills when we can generate all our power from wind?'. The price of wind hasn't gone up, the price of electricity has gone up 50 per cent and we have to control the resource and that's why we need independence."

Euan McGlynn, Alba's Leith candidate, said if elected he plans to take the issues of poverty and social housing to the City Chambers.

He said: "My major thing in Leith is to do with poverty and homelessness, tacked on the back of that is drug and drink abuse but that is caused by poverty and until we cure poverty – there's no ultimate cure for it – but there's help we could be giving. We're very poor on social housing, we're very poor on meeting people's housing needs."

Mr McGlynn, a retired lecturer in photography and audio visual studies, added: "In Leith there's been opportunities missed, down in John's Place there was a really nice two-storey old folks home. It got to the situation where it couldn't operate as an old folks home any more because it didn't have the modern facilities; a brilliant opportunity for the council to turn that into accommodation for the homeless instead of

paying for B and Bs.

“If you go down Leith Links, all these B and Bs are full of homeless people on one night stays. [The council] had an answer, what did they do? They demolished it and it’s an empty site waiting to have private flats built on it.”

NHS Clinician Anne Todd, who’s standing in Portobello/Craigmillar, has been campaigning for independence since the 2014 referendum and switched her support from the SNP to Alba after the party was established last year.

She described herself as “a very experienced activist”, having spent years speaking to people in the ward on their doorsteps about both independence and local issues.

Following recent conversations, she said voters in the ward want “more money in their pockets, better services, better roads and good quality health and social care”.

She added: “I’m a clinician so I absolutely see a link with health, ill health and poverty. I work for the NHS, it’s something that I believe in passionately and as I’ve stated before I believe in what we call the social contract, that’s believing in the welfare state of a free NHS system that’s free at the point of use and funded as well as possible.”



Kevan Shaw Alba candidate City Centre  
City Centre Alba candidate Kevan Shaw said he hopes to address some of the ward's "unique problems" if elected as a

councillor.

He said: "Over-tourism is one, the management of the city itself; issues about cleanliness and issues about maintenance. We seem to have a council who love doing grandstanding projects; the trams or the big refurbishment in the Grassmarket five years ago – it's a mess because there's no maintenance and no cleaning going on. They put in special underground recycling units, they're all broken now and they've got big plastic bins."

Mr Shaw, a lifelong resident of Edinburgh city centre who runs a lighting design company, said the introduction of tourist tax in the city, one of the SNP's key manifesto pledges, is "a very good idea".

He added: "I just don't understand any resistance to it. Because if you're talking about hotels that are charging £80, £90, £100 a night a £2 tourist tax is going to make no significant marketing difference to the price of their hotel room, but it's going to provide a huge amount of additional revenue which we desperately need."

However, the candidate remained realistic of the impact Alba members will have if any are elected to Edinburgh City Council.

"If I'm in, we will be a very small party within the council. I'm not expecting to be leading debates and making big decisions but what I'm expecting to do is to become a real pain in the backside to all the officials who aren't doing their jobs."





Abu Meron Alba candidate in Liberton/Gilmerton Ward  
Meanwhile, Liberton/Gilmerton's Alba candidate Abu Meron said  
providing more support to those living in poverty stricken

parts of the ward would be a priority as a new councillor.

Mr Meron, a member of Liberton and District Community Council who moved to Scotland from Bangladesh 21 years ago, said: "I see people every single day, I see their poverty, I see people going to the foodbank which makes me feel bad. Once I've come across from seven seas and 13 rivers I have made my life over here and I would like to make a contribution to make this place better for everyone the way it should be."

He also called the city's roads "a disaster", calling for the council to make improvements ahead of an influx of tourists and performers in Edinburgh this summer.

"The roads in Edinburgh city is utterly a disaster, every single day I drive into the city and I feel like I'm riding a pony where I'm shaking every single time," he said.

"75,000 people are going to come into the city during this summer for the Fringe festival. Currently, we cannot even move into the city in the rush hour within hour and once 75,000 come in this city it will take an hour and a half for someone to come into the city and out of the city. We don't want to sit in the car and we don't want to spend the time into the road."



All the Alba Party candidates standing in Edinburgh are:

- Liberton/Gilmerton – David Henry
- Morningside – Leah Gunn Barrett

- City Centre – Kevan Shaw
- Leith Walk – Joe Smith
- Leith – Euan McGlynn
- Liberton/Gilmerton – Abu Meron
- Portobello/Craigmillar – Anne Todd

## **By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter**

*The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency : funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.*