

Locals take over tree watering where council fails

A Freedom of Information Request to The City of Edinburgh Council disclosed that the council has planted trees at a cost of almost £50,000 which could be left to die as there is no money to pay for someone to water them.

The council confirmed five years ago in 2017 that 14 Corten Steel tree planters were purchased for installation on Leith Walk at a cost to the local authority of £18,532 plus VAT.

The local authority then bought trees at a cost of £8,119.82 plus VAT. The council also allocated £19,750 plus VAT for a five year maintenance plan which includes soil and watering during the five year period.

But the trees were moved to Leith Links at Hermitage Place, the bottom of Easter Road and Duke Street from Leith Walk while Trams to Newhaven progressed. The contract to water and maintain the trees may have run out, but the trees still need cared for.

Leith Links Community Council carried out emergency watering and have asked the council for action. But it is locals who have risen to the challenge, particularly on the recent very hot days.



John Donoghue local resident People have begun watering the trees on Duke Street as the council has stopped doing so. ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

John Donoghue a local resident has unofficially adopted the ten trees nearby and waters them each morning. He said: "I saw the trees dying with the extreme weather and I thought it was really sad. I thought somebody should do it and then realised I could. So I got a big jug and started to water the trees. Even after a week the trees have turned a little green and have started to recover. The three at Tesco are just too far away. I am happy to do it until the rains come. I like nature and birds but don't have any special knowledge about trees."

Ellie Mills and her daughter Sula (12) have also decided to water the trees on Duke Street. Ellie has expert knowledge since she works as a landscape architect. She said: "I am passionate about the environment and climate change. To me trees are one of our biggest defences against climate change. We live nearby and kept seeing the leaves on these trees turning brown when we were cycling past and decided to do something about it."



Ellie Mills and her daughter Sula People have begun watering the trees on Duke Street as the council has stopped doing so. ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Ellie explained that the Arboriculture Association offer advice on their website about how people can help by watering street trees on their way to school or work.

Cllr Katrina Faccenda said: “I have been trying to find out who was responsible for these trees for a number of weeks since I noticed what a poor state they were in and I tweeted to Edinburgh Help. Leith Links Community Council members took things into their own hands and watered the trees a fortnight ago.

“The FOI request seems to point towards no one currently taking responsibility for the trees. My questions are why was the maintenance work out-sourced to start with when we already have a highly skilled workforce looking after parks and gardens in Edinburgh, and how can we deliver our ambitious targets on tree planting in Edinburgh if we cannot look after a small number of trees?

“Community action is always to be applauded but there has to be a line drawn when we are relying on volunteers to water city trees and clean up the city’s streets. If the council cannot deliver these basic municipal services on current budgets both Scottish and UK governments need to step up and give us the funding, we need.”

Cllr Mandy Watt, Depute Leader of the Council said: “I believe trees in planters will always require maintenance of some kind. My understanding is that there is a community activist who is watering the trees (10 out of 13) and has kindly adopted them. In autumn a lot of community groups clean up leaves too. I do agree that we have Friends groups who help the council a lot. People in Marchmont are also helping by watering the trees there but there has to be a balance between communities taking pride in their surroundings and what should be done by the council. For me I am grateful that communities get involved in their local neighbourhoods.

“We do need trees but perhaps properly planted street trees would be better and we should try and make room in our budget for that.”

It appears that the trees will not be moved again. A council spokesperson said: “My understanding is that the planters that were moved from Leith Walk will be staying in the Easter Road/Leith Links locations with new planters being installed on the route as part of the final landscaping designs.”

The council’s Forestry Service said that trees in planters are not their preferred solution. A spokesperson said: “Trees need purpose built pits which they can become independent in once they establish. Hopefully some permanent tree pits can be incorporated into the final tram designs.”

Trams to Newhaven have removed 87 trees along the route from York Place but will be planting 167 trees so that they comply with the Code of Construction Practice’s 2 for 1 policy. There

will also be more than 13,500 shrubs planted along the route and more than 1,800 herbaceous plants. The contractor will maintain the trees and plants for two years until handing over responsibility to the council.



This tree in a planter was moved from Leith Walk to Leith Links People have begun watering the trees on Duke Street as the council has stopped doing so. ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter