

Resignation of former Lord Provost sparks by-election

A by-election will be held on 9 March 2022 to elect a replacement for the former Rt Hon Lord Provost and councillor for the Corstorphine/Murrayfield ward, Frank Ross, who resigned from the council after the December council meeting.

In his last appearance, Cllr Ross made a speech in support of a financial package to be offered to the traders in Roseburn affected by the City Centre West to East Link (CCWEL) roadworks, and proposed an SNP group addendum to make such payments possible. The SNP could not accommodate any other other group's positions at the meeting, and the outcome is that there is no discretionary support scheme set up for the businesses in Roseburn or at the site of any future roadworks projects.

This is one of the most divisive political spats in the City Chambers since the elections last May when a minority Labour administration took over running the city.



Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh The Rt Hon Frank Ross photographed shortly after taking office PHOTO ©2017 The Edinburgh Reporter

[CCWEL](#) has been divisive from its beginnings under the 2012 to 2017 administration when the Roseburn traders opposed it at every turn, saying it would lead to a reduction in business on Roseburn Terrace where the [works](#) began earlier this year. Notwithstanding claims of lost business and businesses in danger of closing, a new café has opened just recently in the space where the Conservatives had a constituency office. In addition Dine, which is situated just behind the main road, is closed at present – for a complete redecoration.

The Returning Officer, Chief Executive of the City of Edinburgh Council, Andrew Kerr, OBE, said: “Frank Ross made an important contribution to the political and civic life of the capital through his service on the Council and as Lord Provost and I wish him well in the future.”

Voters in the Corstorphine/Murrayfield ward now have a chance to make their voices heard again to elect a councillor to take his place to represent them on the Council of the city.

Candidates will be confirmed when nominations close at 4pm on 6 February.

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday 9 March

The Corstorphine/Murrayfield ward covers Balgreen, Broomhall, Carrick Knowe, Ravelston, and Roseburn and has an electorate of 19,287.

A matter for resignation

Frank Ross was fervent in his support for the businesses in his ward, but the leader of the SNP group, Adam McVey ordered that the group should abstain in the latter stages of the voting process in December, meaning that there was no hope of recompense for the traders in Roseburn – even though a source of funding had been identified.

Outlining the SNP's counter proposal to the administration Cllr Ross said: "I think it's clear from the addenda that we have in front of us that there is a clear majority in the chamber who want to offer support to the small traders of the town centre of Roseburn. I am a bit disappointed to hear Cllr Arthur's words when he does talk about the two areas of Roseburn and North Bridge, because it was the Labour Party who campaigned in May to offer compensation to the traders in Roseburn, but decided not to campaign for a similar project on North Bridge. I find it difficult that they are now bringing these together.

"But I am delighted that the report has managed to find a source of funding which will not negatively impact other projects – as this was a key element of the decision taken earlier by this council.

"In the report itself it consistently refers to Roseburn Terrace which as we all know is the main thoroughfare entering the city centre. But it completely ignores the impact on the small businesses on Murrayfield Place. The SNP addendum addresses that omission by ensuring that they are included.

“Much over the whole term that this has been running – it’s probably been running for a year as a debate in this chamber – much has been made of the support to the traders in Leith through the tram project. I am delighted that the SNP addendum promotes the criteria of a proven system and extends that rather than a brand new system. Indeed the addendum directly addresses paragraph 4.18.5 of the report in that there is no need for a new team to deal with any applications for compensation because that expertise already exists within the tram mechanism.

“Additionally the addendum also identifies very clear principles for future infrastructure projects. Elected members and council officers need to be more aware of the impact in the real world of their decisions on the very much-needed infrastructure improvements, and be willing to support local communities impacted by them wherever they are in the city.

“As we all know Roseburn is one of Edinburgh’s key town centres and one which has a very clear sense of community. The fact that the Murrayfield Community Council has consistently supported the small businesses is evidence of that. However over the last year – and we heard again this morning from the deputations that the environment in the Roseburn area – as a direct result from the infrastructure works has been made incredibly hostile for people. It’s no wonder that footfall has reduced so dramatically.

“It’s with some concern Lord Provost that I read in the report the extrapolation of costs going forward ending up in multi-million pounds of potential liabilities over the remainder of this project. It infers very clearly that no lessons are learned from the way that the project has been implemented over the last twelve months. I’m confident after discussion with those officers and contractors on the ground who have delivered that very significant lessons have been learned, and that the project for the remainder of CCWEL will go exceptionally quickly.

"I cannot imagine for instance the whole Haymarket intersection being totally closed for a year.

"The SNP addendum directly addresses the two main issues of supporting those businesses significantly impacted by the CCWEL project and lays out the principles of how we as a council should plan for the impact of future projects.

"I am aware that there is a composite from the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. I am also aware that the main element of that is asking for a report – pushing a decision further down the line in certain areas for up to six months and potentially beyond.

"I don't think that is what the small businesses, the local businesses actually want. They want action."



Frank Ross who was councillor for Corstorphine/Murrayfield until December 2022

POLITICAL SUPPORT

Cllr Euan Hyslop seconded the SNP addendum and commended Cllr Ross for the campaign that he had run locally to get support for these traders – “whether through making presentations at the Finance & Resources Committee, or in the community speaking to these businesses at the community centre, Cllr Ross has been championing the cause of support for these traders”.

He continued: “The SNP Group will always stand up for small businesses and fight for thriving local high streets but that goes along with our commitment to improving cycling and walking infrastructure throughout the city which increases footfall along these routes enabling long term sustainability for the businesses.

“Our amendment seeks not only to support the traders but also to set out a robust framework for settlement of future support for businesses impacted by certain works. I think that is what sets ours apart and why I encourage everybody to support our amendment.”

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Cllr Euan Davidson moved the Liberal Democrat amendment supporting some kind of recompense. He said: “Here we are again. This is the fourth time this issue has been debated this year in council – a year during which the traders and the wider community have been hammered by constant works. Access for residents, customers and traders has been hugely impacted. We heard again firsthand the hardship that this has caused – one trader losing over 90% of his business compared to the hugely difficult lockdown period. This is a policy choice that the previous council made. But whether we support the scheme or not, surely a recognition of the impact that the choices we make on existing communities has to be front and centre.

That's clearly not been the case here.

"I was delighted when the council passed my motion earlier this year as a new councillor. I felt that the council had actually listened to our community for once. It turns out that was a little premature.

"I want to thank Conservative colleagues for their support in these proposals, and while I might disagree with them I recognise that the Green position has at least been consistent. That can't be said for the other parties in the chamber.

"During the election we saw Labour candidates walk around the community touting the petition and promising their support. Today the administration will break that promise to our traders and residents.

"Finally I want to thank the SNP for finally seeing sense. If the previous administration hadn't blocked this proposal earlier this year we would be much further down the line. I think it is fairly clear the way the first round of voting is going to go on this. So my plea to them is – if you actually support our community, if you actually support our small businesses vote for funding on both rounds."

Cllr Alan Beal (LibDem) seconded that motion saying: "I think no-one can doubt having heard what the Roseburn traders have said – the hardship and distress that they've suffered over the last eight months. I and Cllr Davidson have been down many times to speak to the traders and find out what's happening.

"There have been mistakes and things have been ignored in what the traders in the community are asking for. I think just to address the issue through precedent, again this is what our motion covers, is the Edinburgh Discretionary Business support fund to be used for businesses in the aftermath of Covid. The fund was for Covid recovery which is exactly what these traders were suffering from – the aftermath of Covid combined

with the CCWEL works.

“It is this combined nature that our motion reflects by addressing funding from that particular fund. It is a one-off scheme. I don’t think there is necessarily any precedent being set from this.”

Cllr Ben Parker moved a Green addendum, saying that he urged colleagues to think about the longer term impact of the decision being made “not just on the city’s finances, but also on how this will affect other spends, our ability to develop and implement other vital active travel projects in the future.”

He continued: “Whilst we are sympathetic to issues that may have arisen during the CCWEL works we believe that the report is clear on the financial and legal implications that would follow from introducing a discretionary support scheme for traders in Roseburn, or as standard for future transport infrastructure projects.

“We believe that it would be unwise to introduce such a scheme and that the most helpful way forward for all parties – residents, visitors, businesses, offices, councillors is to make a definitive decision on this issue today based on the report.

“We note there is a wealth of evidence on the pedestrian pound which shows that creating spaces that benefit people walking, wheeling and cycling, as this scheme does, can also significantly increase income of businesses over the medium to longer term. We believe that increased investment in such schemes is the best way to support businesses whilst also tackling air pollution, congestion and the climate crisis.”



Transport Convener Lesley Macinnes with Active Travel Minister, Patrick Harvie break ground at City Centre West to East Link in Roseburn with Karen McGregor Portfolio Director for Sustrans and pupils from Roseburn Primary School L-R Maheer Zahir (10), Isla Kinnear (10) Molly Jamieson (11) and Sadie Walsh (11) PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

CONSERVATIVES

Conservative councillor Mairi Clair Munro said the work had been due to take seven months but had already taken ten. "Traders have told us of the delays to work, including finding asbestos – all while parking and loading bays were blocked off by roadworks." She mentioned that there was no signposting for visitors to show them where to park. She urged that the council should look at this as a one-off payment as this local high street is one of the key areas in the city.

Cllr Phil Daggart (Cons) said: "It is good to know there are three parties who are consistent in their approach. The Greens and the LibDems have been consistent. The Labour candidate's

proposal during the May election was overturned, but then there is the SNP who say we are against it, against it – no we're for it. How did that happen just like that? Is it anything to do with being in opposition and trying to court popularity to shore up the falling vote of a certain councillor in the city? I am far too cynical to suggest that."

Cllr Doggart agreed that a blanket compensation scheme for infrastructure projects would be a dangerous route but did suggest a further report is made to Finance and Resources to confirm any future action.

He also pointed out that three infrastructure projects – North Bridge, CCWEL and (as he referred to it) "the completion" of the first phase of the tram line – are all behind schedule and over budget, but without citing any supporting evidence.

Cllr Doggart also pointed out that there is more to CCWEL than just Roseburn and that other traders could also be affected and make claims to the council. But he wanted to support jobs in the city and wanted some form of compensation.

Adam McVey, the SNP Group leader, said he wanted to address some "strange quirks in this debate because the SNP has put forward a plan based on funding identified by officers. The reason that we didn't put it in our manifesto and go out and try and win votes on that basis is that we didn't think there was a source of funding that could be used in this way. That has emerged in the report and has driven our position. Parties are quite right to call out the hypocrisy of Labour on this, trying to maximise their vote at the ballot box and then turning their back as soon as the election is over.

"But the SNP has taken a decision based on what is here and I have to say being attacked by people who are then asking us to support their nonsensical plans, their exclusionary plans. I would say to the LibDems and the Tories that if you want to do this then stop playing politics, withdraw your version that

you know we do not support and back the SNP plan.”



Cllr Kevin Lang became leader of the Liberal Democrat Group as his predecessor, Robert Aldridge, became Lord Provost in May 2022. PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Kevin Lang the leader of the Liberal Democrat Group rose to say “that “Since we are starting to look back at history I have the motion which Cllr Scott Douglas brought forward.” He explained this was a suggestion that the council might “look into” the possibility of setting up a compensation scheme for those businesses affected by the works from a previous Conservative councillor.

Lang continued: “The LibDems supported that but the SNP voted against it. I hope that we have now got to a place where we are going to right a wrong about what happened in March. The reality is that wrong should never have happened in March in the first place.”



Cllr Joanna Mowat Conservative councillor for the City Centre
PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Jo Mowat also looked back as to why the Roseburn traders have approached the council for compensation. She said it was a scheme which has been poorly handled, and narrated that the traders informed the council that they were told work would begin in one month only to find the road closed two days later. Traders had bought stock for the next month, but due to the council's actions the stock went to waste. As the councillor for the city centre she also said there had been many complaints – a different kind of complaint but complaints nonetheless about a badly run scheme. She continued: "The difference comes because Cllr Ross has brought forward a plan which he says is the only plan the SNP can agree whereas the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have said bring forward a scoping exercise for future projects. It would not affect the Roseburn project. If we planned our works properly and carried them out in accordance with the plans then we would never have to pay a penny piece to any businesses in compensation."

Shouting and thumping the desk she exclaimed: "This is the fundamental problem here. We have not been able to do that and in doing so have ruined the livelihoods of many of these small traders. No-one can sit here and say that they are supporting small businesses when we conduct our business like that. It has been shameful what we have done to those businesses. We have a remedy, but a token, on the table today. I am very concerned that the hubris and arrogance of one party – because we will not do it their way when we have asked as we always do for a report to come back for discussion, to question officers and to shape that in a sensible way may well fall because we will not do it their way.

Cllr Scott Arthur Transport Convener

Cllr Arthur summed up after these various amendments to the administration motion, saying he had paid attention to everyone who had spoken and commended Cllr Ross who had stood up for the traders even during the last administration.

But he admitted he had not really heard from Cllr Ross why the council's position on this should change, and how a routine compensation scheme would be managed. He said: "I didn't hear anybody offering anything to the North Bridge traders. I met with them all last week and in particular the Scran Café where the people who run it told me that because of the works they are struggling to earn a living to maintain their own household."

He lamented that none of the city centre councillors had offered anything to the North Bridge businesses. He said it is a difficult decision to make but could not support any compensation as the longer term impacts are so uncertain.

The council's decision was therefore not to support the Roseburn traders with any form of compensation for loss of

business during the works.



Cllr Frank Ross the Rt Hon Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh at Murrayfield Ice Rink. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Frank Ross

Mr Ross has confirmed to The Edinburgh Reporter that he remains a member of the SNP. He has also recently taken up a new position as Financial Accountant and Business Analyst with a Scottish firm. Previous to his political career he held various accountant and managerial roles in several businesses including his hotel in the north of Scotland.

As a keen curler he will now take part in the Strathcona Cup Tour 2023 in Canada, playing in the East Team in many of the matches in a variety of Canadian cities and towns until the tour ends at the beginning of February.

Cllr Adam McVey, the SNP group leader since Frank Ross stepped

aside from the leadership in 2017 said: “I’d like to thank Frank for his work over more than a decade on the Council. He’s been a tireless campaigner for the communities of Corstorphine/Murrayfield, as well making huge achievements leading the city’s economic development and then becoming only the second SNP Councillor in Edinburgh’s history to serve as Lord Provost. We wish him very well for the future post-council.”

Council Leader, Cllr Cammy Day, said: “I am very sad to see former Lord Provost Frank Ross leave the council so abruptly, after the SNP leadership creating a farce at last council meeting. I wish Frank all the best in his future endeavours.”

Roseburn Traders

The report prepared for the council set out the way that a scheme for the Roseburn businesses differed from that offered to businesses on Leith Walk who have received help and support during the building of the Tram to Newhaven.

It stated: “The decision to introduce a business continuity fund was made in 2018, as part of the business case for the Tram to Newhaven project, and is principally focused on addressing hardship during the works, not compensation for loss of profit. There has been no similar support scheme since that time.”

Council officers warned against setting a precedent by establishing a compensation programme for the Roseburn businesses – saying that any thought of a precedent from the Trams scheme would only be made worse by paying off traders in the Roseburn town centre.

But the report also set out ways of paying up to £3,000 to each business subject to certain criteria which would cost around £100,000 in total. And it set out a possible source of the funding – the **Edinburgh Discretionary Business Support**

Fund which was set up to help businesses in the post-Covid recovery period.

Any other kind of discretionary scheme would be a first for any Scottish council and would have had financial implications for any future infrastructure schemes, meaning a cost to the council of at least £500,000 per annum if the funding came from the council's revenue budget.

And it is the revenue budget which will be the council's big news when it is debated and fixed in February.



Roseburn pictured before the CCWEL works began