

Corstorphine/Murrayfield by election – hustings brings out candidates' views

A Labour candidate standing in the Corstorphine/Murrayfield by-election says he supports compensation for businesses disrupted by the construction of a cycle route through the area which has been planned since 2014.

Richard Parker made the statement at a hustings on Monday night – despite his party voting against such a move just two months ago.

Mr Parker was one of six candidates quizzed on the subject at a hustings held this week ahead of the 9 March ballot to elect a new councillor for Corstorphine/Murrayfield.

Residents in the ward were keen to hear their views on the impact of the City Centre to West End Link (CCWEL), an active travel scheme which some have opposed locally saying that it removes parking spaces outside shops and has brought prolonged roadworks to the Roseburn area.

Traders say the scheme has caused a dramatic drop in footfall and income – and have said this since the plans were first mooted some years ago.

Asked if he backed a compensation programme to be set up for

the businesses negatively affected, Mr Parker said he did, contrary to the position the council's Labour group took when a vote was held in December.

At the City Chambers meeting Lib Dem and Conservative councillors were defeated on the issue by Labour and the Greens, after the SNP group abstained.

The by-election was triggered the next day by the resignation of the SNP group's Corstorphine/Murrayfield councillor Frank Ross, who had campaigned in May 2022 for traders to receive financial support.

All but three candidates turned up to the hustings event at Corstorphine Community Centre on Monday evening with Liberal Democrat Fiona Bennett as well as the SNP's Donald Rutherford and Richard Fettes from the Scottish Family Party missing the event.

Hugh Findlay, who is standing for the Conservatives, said the only reason the by-election was being held was because SNP and Labour councillors "turned their back" on businesses.

He said: "This is not the first of these sorts of badly planned, badly communicated and badly implemented schemes that have been implemented over the last 20 years by Labour-run, SNP-run and by Lib Dem-run councils.

"We have to learn the lessons of what, in my opinion, clearly went wrong [with the CCWEL] which is that we didn't engage properly, we didn't really seek to learn from different modelling and it was designed in a way that frankly annoyed a lot of people."



Richard Parker (wearing a red tie)

Mr Parker, a pupil support teacher who stood in the ward at last year's full council election and gained 7.8 per cent of first preference votes, hit back saying the by-election "came because Edinburgh is the lowest funded council in Scotland and has been for the last 15 years, year on year – we can't provide it".

The Scottish Green's Chris Young, the only candidate who said he did not support the bid for compensation for loss of business, argued the new cycle route is an "improvement in the space" and would bring more people to shops in the area, benefiting traders overall and cited well-known research which proves cyclists and pedestrians spend more than those arriving in cars.

Mr Young, a gardener for 30 years and now a stay at home dad to two young children, said his main priorities as a councillor would be addressing high levels of pollution

locally and reducing accidents on the roads.

Calling for for a greater expansion of active travel he said: "We do so many [car] journeys, we pick up our car keys and we see freedom – that's the biggest lie of any advertising campaign I've ever seen. We need to let go of our car keys and walk. You can cycle as far as you can drive in 15 minutes in a city."

Independent candidate Pete Gregson, a former Edinburgh Council employee and Labour activist prior to the invasion of Iraq, who was later excluded from the GMB Union, led the campaign against the CCWEL. He told the voters in the audience that he likes cycling "but doesn't expect other people to enjoy it".

Mr Gregson also claimed the removal of parking spaces to accommodate the bike route "has increased pollution." He said: "That's because they've taken away a line of parking – parking reduces pollution at the door front by 30 per cent. If you take away the parking, all the traffic moves that much closer to the people living in tenemented properties." This was a line of evidence given at the Scottish Government Inquiry on the CCWEL when a former SEPA employee gave evidence to the hearing held in the City Chambers. The proposed draft road order became the subject of the inquiry between 2018 and 2020 when no work could proceed. Inquiry sessions were held at the City Chambers when verbal evidence was heard from Mr Gregson and others.



The audience at the hustings in Corstorphine Community Centre. A by election is being held in Corstorphine/Murrayfield on 9 March 2023 PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Another independent candidate in attendance, Elaine Miller, said the roadworks around Roseburn have been a key issue among voters when knocking doors in the ward.

Mrs Miller, known online as Gussie Grips, made headlines in January when she 'flashed' from the Scottish Parliament gallery in protest at gender recognition reforms, using fake pubic hair.

A women's health physiotherapist, she said her job is to "listen to a person about what their problem is and find out the nubbins of what the issue is and find a solution" which she added "is the job description of a city councillor."

Mrs Miller said if elected she would organise a meeting with local residents who understand the issues surrounding the CCWEL project, as well as the CEOs from Edinburgh City Council and contractor Balfour Beatty "who must be talented men

because they're both being paid a lot of money".



Elaine Miller standing and speaking to the audience at the Corstorphine Community Centre hustings. PHOTO ©The Edinburgh Reporter

Scottish Libertarian Party candidate Gary Smith also said he supported Roseburn businesses being compensated but asked: "Why don't the shopkeepers sue the individual councillors personally?"

He added: "You're asking the taxpayer to fix a mess of their making. That would put some sort of serious thinking into councillors in future if they're personally liable for personally messing up somebody's business.

"Ultimately a lot of the problems we're talking about are made by politicians who are creating problems like the Roseburn situation – why were they doing it in the first place?

"At the moment we are under attack as a people because there are a whole bunch of plans coming through the pipeline that nobody seems to talk about anymore."

The Corstorphine/Murrayfield by-election will be held on Thursday, March 9.

All the candidates standing are:

- *Fiona Bennett, Scottish Liberal Democrats*
- *Richard Fettes, Scottish Family Party: Pro-Family, Pro-Marriage, Pro-Life*
- *Hugh Findlay, Scottish Conservative and Unionist*
- *Pete Gregson, Independent*
- *Elaine Miller, Independent*
- *Richard Parker, Scottish Labour Party*
- *Donald Rutherford, Scottish National Party (SNP)*
- *Gary Smith, Scottish Libertarian Party*
- *Chris Young, Scottish Green Party*

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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All candidates at the top table at the hustings in Corstorphine Community Centre. A by election is being held in Corstorphine/Murrayfield on 9 March 2023 PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter