

Corstorphine/Murrayfield by election – Murrayfield hustings

Corstorphine/Murrayfield by election will be held on 9 March, and on Tuesday night there was a second hustings event when locals got the opportunity to meet and ask questions of the candidates.

The hustings was held at Murrayfield Parish Church Hall with an audience of around 50 people.

All candidates, except the SNP candidate Donald Rutherford who is aiming to hold the seat for the SNP, were present to face the public who submitted questions in writing and anonymously.

Chair of Murrayfield Community Council, John Yellowlees, chaired the event which ran very smoothly, and with a large dose of good humour until the last minute when a woman in the audience asked the candidates to answer her question “What is a woman?”. One of the members of the audience who had been live tweeting the meeting, responded with a four letter expletive. The woman who asked the question told us that she lived in the ward.

The hustings ended at that point, half an hour after the intended finish time.

All candidates first of all introduced themselves, including Richard Fettes of the Scottish Family Party who we met for the

first time this evening. He said he is married with three grown up children and one granddaughter. He is a retired prison officer with 20 years service, a committed Christian and his hobbies include DIY and gardening. He is interested in Current Affairs and likes to keep abreast of what's going on politically at home and abroad. He joined the Scottish Family Party because they believe in the importance of families and communities and traditional values. He continued that council services are vital and maintaining these services at a high standard for all for all of us should be a priority. Showing that he has been following recent events at the City Chambers, he said: "I welcome much of the recent passed LibDem budget, that we'll see an increase of £3 million for waste management and street cleaning to tackle things like graffiti, removal and flytipping.

"An extra £11 million to improve the appalling state of roads, especially the filling in of potholes, which is also very welcome, as is extra funding to help prevent flooding, which is of course a priority for Murrayfield in this Ward. Not so welcome is the council tax rise of 5%, but given inflation and severe budget constraints it could have been worse, although it does put a greater burden on homeowners whose mortgage rates are rising."

The questions were pretty standard, and the answers reasonably appropriate for each candidate's political stance. Most said no to an extension to the City Centre West to East Link (CCWEL) out to Corstorphine.

The £19 million infrastructure which is being built from Roseburn to Charlotte Square at present, has been a bone of contention in the area for almost a decade.

Chris Young the Scottish Greens candidate explained about the pedestrian pound and said that rather than the council compensating the businesses in Roseburn affected by the roadworks, they would be more than compensated in due course

with increased trade.

He explained that based on research the pedestrian pound has been assessed as the more valuable.



Hugh Findlay Conservatives

Hugh Findlay (Conservative) repeated his claim that the council ran consultations which they did not then listen to or act upon. He said that people should have a say to “influence the future of the streets that they live in”. He also rejected the notion that the Ward would end up being represented by three Liberal Democrat councillors. He said: “We have an opportunity to elect a local councillor from a different party to the incumbents that we currently have. Because across this Ward, there is a diversity of views, we cannot just have three people saying the same things. That doesn’t give you accountability.”



Fiona Bennett Scottish Liberal Democrats

Fiona Bennett (LibDem) started out as a mental health nurse, and recently has been working for Wendy Chamberlain MP. She explained she went to Iraq twice “where I had conversations that I will never forget with women trying to survive and recover”. She continued: “I realised how important local democracy is. For me this is where democracy starts.” She suggested that as a third LibDem councillor in the ward “we can give you the best possible service”.



Chris Young Scottish Greens

Chris Young (Scottish Greens) explained that he supports the idea of Vision Zero which is the idea that within the next seven years “We would get the city to a point where we don’t have any road deaths across our streets. It’s also a 60% reduction in serious injury to children by 2030”. He continued: “The more we can do to get people out to kind of cycling, walking, getting it out to travel, the easier that target efficiency by 2030 becomes.”



Elaine Miller Independent

Elaine Miller began her speech in the same way as last week saying: "I am your female, local and independent councillor. I'm a physiotherapist that's what my background is in and physiotherapy is basically listening to somebody to find out what the nub of the problem is and then working with them to figure out what the priorities are."

Having had her three children in four years she became interested in women's health noting that it is "underfunded, under researched, and under resourced". She explained that she had petitioned for the Baby Box to include a vest for the baby saying on it "Do your pelvic floor exercises Mummy" and had almost got enough funding to make that happen.



Richard Parker

Richard Parker (Edinburgh Labour) is a full time teacher and motivated by championing education. He said: “Today’s schools are tomorrow’s societies, and we must make sure that they are inclusive.

Speaking more assuredly than at the last hustings event he said: “On the ninth of March, there is an opportunity to elect an experienced teacher straight into the administration to where the decisions are made, who will be able to back residents and to lead Edinburgh towards our ambitious net zero goals of 2013.”



Pete Gregson addressing the meeting

Pete Gregson an Independent candidate said he was the only one who understands the council as he worked there for 10 years and then explained where his politics began. He said: "It's the kind of body that you really need to understand from the inside. In 2009 I had two kids at Roseburn Primary School but they suddenly cut a teacher. And at that point, you know, my kid was going to be going into a class of 17 and then it was going to be a class of 30.

"So I organised the parents to do a protest, and we fought and that evolved into something called Kids not Suits, which was about putting children before bureaucrats."



Gary Smith Scottish Libertarian Party

The Scottish Libertarian Party candidate, Gary Smith, said his campaign is very simple. It is based on freedom of speech and freedom to go where you want to go without asking anybody for permission. He said: "We should not be imposing ideologies on the people. I notice there's a lot of talk about climate crisis, and that's the reason we've got to do all this, this, that and the other within 20 minute cities and all the rest. Well fine.

"If people want to cycle about and walk about in the 10 Minute Zone, do that. But don't tell me to do that. And don't demand I do that based on laws that that we'll create. And digital IDs – if you want to live in China go and live in China. I don't. This is Edinburgh. Right? It's a free country. It was a free country. It's gradually being eroded very badly. That's what the Libertarian Party is about. It's not a new idea. It's the oldest idea. And we're letting it slip because we're asking government to keep helping us. And we're allowing them to take control of your life, you should be in charge of your

life, not Edinburgh Council.”

Would the candidates support trams from Granton/Newhaven along the Roseburn Path?

Asked about extending the trams from Granton/Newhaven up the Roseburn Path, all candidates ignored the fact that this is already included in the City Mobility Plan approved by councillors earlier this month. Most said they would approve it, with Richard Parker saying he uses the trams and buses all the time to get round the city. He added: ” I see this as part of us getting ready as a city for catastrophic climate change.”

Pete Gregson said that the tram was badly designed from the start and should have been a tram/train system running on rails and on the streets. But he thinks if the tram runs on the Roseburn Path it must be done carefully and sensitively, and the path should be left for cyclists, pedestrians and badgers. “We need to use that space.”

Gary Smith opposes the idea of a climate emergency saying that the delusion about global warming is infantile and unscientific. He continued: “And it’s now affecting policies which cost billions of pounds, and are wrecking our lives and are using it to create a control grid to make your life intolerable in future. They don’t say that it. They keep saying it’s 2030 though. Why is it always 2030? Where did they get that from? Did they dream it up themselves?”

Fiona Bennett does not support building the tram on the path network as “it’s a great resource for the community”. She said: “And in terms of trams, we’d need to really be convinced by business plans and Liberal Democrats would consult the community and abide by the wishes of the community.”

Chris Young said that we had just witnessed climate change denier bingo this evening. And on trams he said: "Do I think a tram extension is a good idea? Absolutely. Why? Because trams convey more people than any other public transport modes, in huge numbers really, really well. You can get something like 200 people in a tram, 65 on the bus. Buses get caught up in congestion, so trams are the way to go. I absolutely fully support this next, tranche of tram extensions, it needs to be done sensitively and it needs to be done with other modes of transport too."



Richard Fettes Scottish Family Party

Richard Fettes likes the trams, often leaving his car at the local shopping centre and taking the tram to the city centre. But he doesn't believe the tram is the answer to climate change, nor does he think it will happen in the next five to ten years. He said: "I think it's a question of the local community being taken into account. The problem I have with the Scottish Government and council is they do all these surveys, they speak to people to get your opinion, and then

they completely ignore it.”

Hugh Findlay agreed it is important that a local council listens to what people actually want. Proving he had listened to the council’s budget meeting last Thursday he said: “When we’re talking about hundreds of millions of pounds potentially being spent on this, I can’t help but think of all of the things that we hear from the council administration that there’s no money for. You know, last week, we heard that there was no money for reviving the cycle hire scheme. That’s something that’s pretty widely supported. People enjoyed it, people liked it, I used it, I think a lot of people thought it was great. And yet apparently, there’s no money for that.”

Elaine Miller said she lives in a street where she could be impacted by the tram extension so admitted a bias. She continued raising a laugh from the audience by saying: “What’s fascinating, though, is having looked at the minutes in the council, I can’t find any detail that this proposal is going ahead. It seems to have been shelved, and it seems that the proposal which is now under consideration is to go from the Western, out to the Royal Infirmary, which would be a much more sensible route. Because if a tram can get what did you say 200 people in it – I’m not sure why 200 People want to go to Ravelston – it’s a cultural desert. There’s no need to go there.”

The by election takes place on 9 March.



All the candidates flank John Yellowlees at the top table