

Practical steps should lead to re-siting of controversial hubs

The controversial rules about the siting of Edinburgh's bin hubs have been relaxed.

Most important among the changes agreed by the city council's Transport and Environment Committee has been the agreement to ditch the rule that people should not have to cross a road to deposit rubbish.

This had created scenarios in some streets where bins were directly outside doors or windows when there were vacant sites across the road on open land or against gable walls.

Councillor Max Mitchell said: "This morning, as in previous committees, we councillors have heard about the issues of bin hubs, the hurt, the upset, the anxiety, the stress and disruption caused to lives because of these hubs.

"We all now have examples of people who have moved house so that they could get away. All of this has been avoidable and what has also been avoidable as was the reputational damage to this council."

He said the new relaxed rules should represent best practice. "We should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good here."

Earlier in the meeting the committee heard from Kate Macnairney, a campaigner from the South Meadows Action Group (SMAG). She told the committee that all of the rules

established around the siting of bin hubs: “are overly constricting and have resulted in bin hub locations that are seriously upsetting to our members’ health and well-being. This needs to be addressed before the next council elections”.

The local action group for Marchmont residents laid out an eight-point plan calling for changes to the existing rules – starting with the demand for resident’s amenity taking priority over all in choosing sites for hubs.

They called for scrapping of existing rules around distances to bins and the limitations posed by not having to cross a road. The group also called for an end to food and glass bins sited in the bin hubs because of the noise and health hazards.

A representative of the Stair Association of 10-14 Bruntsfield Gardens made a plea for greater flexibility in the numbers of bins, especially glass: “are overly constricting, and have resulted in Bin Hub locations that are seriously upsetting to our members’ health and well-being. This needs to be addressed before the next council elections.”

Amendments had also come from the Lib Dems and Conservatives. A composite of all elements agreeing to greater flexibility was agreed.

Councillors agreed that officers had had no choice in the past but to work within a very strict framework which had led to widespread distress across the city. Consultants hired by the council to locate the bin hubs initially used Google maps, a practice branded “wholly inadequate” and on which “did not involve any common sense.”

Councillor Stephen Jenkinson, convenor of th committee, said: “I’m happy to move the officers report along with the Labour group amendment.

“What was clear to me was that the framework was a little bit too constrained. About 90% of the bin hubs sites are fine. What we are looking to do is nudge that success rate to 95%, we are likely to always have difficulties in certain areas. I think it’s important to listen to voices of community councils and other external stakeholders.

Councillor Jenkinson said later: “These are positive steps to try and bring as many people along with us on this solution for waste management in the city. I think this is the right solution for Edinburgh – we just have to work on the placement of bin hubs to satisfy as many people as possible.

“If we can improve that satisfaction rate by introducing a little bit of flexibility then that’s the approach we should take.”

Councillor Mitchell thanked the various deputations who addressed the committee adding: “At last the department has realised its previous decisions and recommendations on the strict rules were a mistake and I’m glad that Labour councillors with their amendment today have realised that blocking my and colleagues attempts over the last few years to increase flexibility was perhaps not the way to go.”

He told the convenor Councillor Stephen Jenkinson: “You’re very late to the party but you are welcome, convenor.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter