



ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

1. The Northfield and Willowbrae Community Council was re-established through elections held in October 2016, following a public petition. The opening AGM was held on 3 November 2016 at which office bearers were elected. Seven ordinary meetings have been held. Members and office bearers are listed at the end of this report.

2. No AGM was held in 2017 as the constitution requires this to be in May or June at which time the community council had barely started work. For form's sake, elections for office bearers were conducted on 25 May with all continuing in their posts.

A New Start

3. The previous community council had been active and a significant proportion of its members were elected to the present one. On the closure of the previous community council, its funds were returned to the City of Edinburgh Council and the bank account closed. In restarting, a new bank account had to be established, which took some time and the funds reclaimed from the City Council. The opportunity was taken to move to internet banking which simplified money management.

4. The members now include people with a wide variety of background, skills and ages – the average age is probably below that for most community councils. Although this adds strength, it has to be recognised that all members are volunteers and younger people have to contribute alongside work and family commitments, including new babies.

Public Engagement

5. It continues to be difficult to engage with the people who live in our area. Community councils are often brought to focus by problems and controversies which, for the most part, are rare in Northfield and Willowbrae. We have given considerable thought into collecting the views of our community, so as to be able to convey those to authorities as required by our constitution. Traditionally, community councils use public meetings and circulated newsletters. These have their place but social media provide a more direct and inter-linked way to inform our area and to receive views and ideas.

6. Although we have a website, we use this mainly for matters of record like meeting papers and important correspondence. We have an emailing list – but this has less than 100 members. We use Twitter, lightly; our Facebook page has proved relatively popular and is maintained by four members. We were advised to focus on these methods and by paying to “boost” some posts have been able to reach several thousand people on occasion. However, on subjects where controversy was expected (mainly planning issues) our community has not become much involved.

Work Programme

7. Early on we adopted three work strands:

- Planning – a staple for community councils
- Cycling
- Inclusion – recognising that a quiet community may have many people who are not fully engaged with their neighbours

Planning

8. 235 Willowbrae Road. Within weeks of our formation, a major planning application was made for a substantial block of student accommodation on the site of the former Mercedes garage at 235 Willowbrae Road. Quickly, people who lived near to the proposed building sought our involvement. We held a public meeting on 6 December 2016 and submitted comments on the application on 12 December. That application was refused by the City of Edinburgh Council but a new application for a smaller building was made in April 2017. We made a response similar to our first (basically saying that neither application met the Council's declared policies) and this too was refused. The site is still in use as a garage. However, immediately neighbouring buildings have changed hands and there have been some demolitions so this is an area where change is in prospect.

9. Treverlen Park. A planning application was submitted to build a new park on the site of the soon to be replaced St John's Roman Catholic Primary School. This had been the subject of several rounds of public consultation and discussion by the City Council – and was broadly welcomed. Owners of properties immediately surround the site had a number of technical points they wished assurance on and these were passed to the Council in December 2017. Permission was granted in early 2018. The new St John's school is on track to open on 20 August 2018.

10. Meadowbank: The City Council conducted public consultations in 2016 on proposals to replace the stadium and sports centre at Meadowbank. The site lies in the area of Craightinny & Meadowbank Community Council which was not fully operational at the time. In early 2018, the Council published final planning proposals for the sports centre and an application for permission in principle for the rest of the site. Some parts of the area generated neighbour notification for properties in Northfield & Willowbrae. We worked jointly with Craightinny & Meadowbank CC to gauge the views of our two communities. We held a drop-in meeting on 20 February, to enable local people to discuss the applications, and a traditional public meeting on 28 February; both were in St Margaret's House. In parallel a public campaign was mounted by an outside group to object to both applications.

11. On 3 March the two community councils submitted a letter to the planning authority conveying the views we had heard. No decisions have yet been made by the planning authority.

Cycling

12. Our cycling group took up work started by the previous community council to identify safe routes across our area, particularly through Holyrood Park (most of which is within our area). Historic Environment Scotland has been helpful in this and, as a result of our concerns, is preparing a traffic management study of the Low Road to Duddingston. Changes within the City Council have held back progress on other proposals.

Inclusion

13. We held three events connecting P7 pupils from local schools and older people, brought together, for example, by food memories and the Chinese New Year – to which 125 people attended. These are very successful, making unlikely connections across our community. Many organisations have contributed to these and the programme continues into the rest of 2018. They require heavy input by a small group of community councillors and council officers. The aim has been to find the hard to reach people.

14. One unexpected spin –off has been the keenness of local businesses to become involved. This meets another goal, as our businesses are part of what give the local feel to our community.

Relations with the City of Edinburgh Council

15. We have enjoyed very warm support from the 8 City Councillors whose wards cover our area, at meetings, in the margins and in the Craigentiny & Meadowbank Neighbourhood Partnership. We feel that we are genuine partners in seeking good outcomes for our area. Their ability to engage with us has been constrained by slow progress in setting up the Locality system and its formal committees. The loss of council officers, which continues as almost a daily occurrence, has considerably hampered progress, even when they have been replaced with new and experienced people.

16. Almost all effort to move forward hits obstacles of budgets not set, programmes not clear, authority uncertain. A devotion to process, principally in creating the Locality Improvement Plan (LIP), is bringing little benefit to our area. We have approached the 7 community councils in the NE Locality Area to see whether there is scope for further joint working but early indications are not encouraging.

17. Our key plan, POLO, has been side-lined in face of the LIP despite formal approaches to the North East Locality Committee. This would bring visible improvements to the Portobello Road and London Road area, improving pedestrian and cycling safety. We intend to increase our efforts to have this programme implemented.

Membership

Sarah	Cleary	
Paul	Dunleavey	
Dave	Ferguson	
Gordon	Macdonald	
Nick	Marshall	
Ian	Murray	
John	Nisbet	Vice-chair
Geoff	Pearson	Secretary
Samantha	Rutherford	
Lorraine	Simpson	Chair
Nick	Weech	Treasurer
Bill	Whyte	
Charlie	Wood	

Meeting Dates 2018-19 (Proposed)

1 13 September

2 11 October

15-22 October Half term

3 15 November

4 13 December

24 December – 8 January Christmas and New Year

5 10 January

14 February Half term

6 14 March

7 4 April

8-22 April Easter

6 May, 20 May May Holidays

8 + AGM 16 May