

LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

THIS PLACE MATTERS - IN YOUR OWN WORDS

There's an exciting diversity and interesting multicultural mix here - which means constant change. That's laid on top of historical roots with real depth. They combine to support authenticity, originality and creativity in the community. We are well connected to the rest of the City by bus, but have a poor Edinburgh-wide image. Leith Walk itself is seen as something of a scar. That's because the air of neglect, dilapidation and dereliction speaks louder than the good local shops, library and parks. For the locals it can be untidy, with bad pavements, dirt, street rubbish bins and ugly spaces.

The members of Leith Central Community Council find themselves intolerant of the inequality we see around us, the lack of opportunity in poor areas and the plight of jobless young people. It's part of our various commitments to justice for our society and environment to want to change that.

We hope and would like to believe that anything is possible, but, in the various agencies working here, we see fragmentation, inept attempts at working together and a lack of vision. It is difficult to see or understand how they work; they are not explicit, sometimes difficult to find and confusing to local people. The culture and tools for working together seem not to be available to them. And we need to admit that we ourselves can be ineffective too. We are just volunteers, and are willing to be transparent and involve others, but find that our one to one relationships with our neighbours are both random and rare. Our 'coverage' in the area is small. We recognise that people can sometimes expect things to 'just happen' or can feel defeated and apathetic, even negative. Our task, using modern means where necessary, is to make our belief in local democracy more real, create stronger personal relationships within the community and encourage people to express themselves.

In that we feel motivated, empowered and quietly encouraged. But we also feel confused, ineffective, frustrated and scared. Some are uncertain about our role.

Our hopefulness makes us look towards the future. For the young and the unemployed we see an improvement in the quality of the place, especially in the townscape of Leith Walk, as a key to a more equal future, where there is deeper involvement and greater empowerment. That improved quality of place includes more trees and gardens, quality public realm, more cycle ways, a cultural and heritage centre, improved civic pride and a high-tech hub. Almost a tourist destination in fact.

It seems at the moment there is fragile and uncertain progress towards that. We need to continue to see things in their bigger context and encourage risks to be taken

We seek the power to change, to make our place a better place to live. We know that this can happen only through the power of neighbourliness and a strong community. For our neighbours, for our children and grandchildren, we want this place to be better, cleaner, safer, greener.

Compiled by Trevor Davies using only the words of LCCC participants in 'This Place Matters'

6 February 2014