

Edinburgh, 5th October 2023

Leith Central Community Council

planning@leithcentralcc.co.uk

Subject: Request for Increased Transparency and Community Council Involvement in the Planning process

Dear David Givan,

We, Leith Central Community Council (LCCC), write to express our deep concern regarding the transparency and community involvement in the Planning process within the City of Edinburgh.

While we acknowledge the importance of a well-structured and efficient Planning system, we believe that there is room for improvement to ensure that the voices of our communities are not only heard but also given the weight they deserve.

One of the fundamental aspects of a fair Planning process is transparency.

It is crucial for the residents of Edinburgh to have access to all relevant information related to Planning applications and decisions. However, there is often a lack of transparency in the current system, making it difficult for residents to fully understand the rationale behind decisions made by the Planning department. Therefore, we kindly request that the City of Edinburgh Council take immediate steps to enhance transparency in the Planning process.

Specifically, we urge the Planning department to:

1. Make Objections Public

Currently, objections to Planning applications are not always made public, making it challenging for residents to gauge the level of community opposition or support for a proposed development. We request that all objections and comments related to Planning applications be made easily accessible to the public on the Council's website. This will not only enhance transparency but also foster a sense of accountability.

2. Provide Clearer Information

The Planning process can be complex and intimidating for residents who are not familiar with Planning jargon and procedures. We propose that the Council improve communication by providing clearer, more accessible information about Planning applications, procedures, and deadlines. This will empower residents to participate more effectively in the process.

3. Community Council Input

Community councils play a vital role in representing the interests of local communities. However, their input in the Planning process is often given insufficient weight. We suggest that the City of Edinburgh Council place greater emphasis on the recommendations and

objections raised by community councils when making Planning decisions. This would ensure that the concerns and priorities of local communities are adequately considered.

4. Increased Public Consultation

Public consultation is a critical aspect of the Planning process. However, the current level of public engagement often falls short of what is needed. We recommend that the Council genuinely seek and consider public input, especially for major developments that could significantly impact local neighbourhoods. This could involve holding more public meetings, forums, and surveys to gather community perspectives.

6. Lack of transparency in non material variations

Our community expresses significant concerns regarding the lack of transparency concerning non-material alterations to approved Planning applications. We have become aware that the Planning department, in at least one instance, has allowed retroactive modifications to the ratio of student accommodation versus general housing after the approval of a Planning application. The development at 48-50 Iona Street ([20/00972/FUL](#)) serves as an illustrative example, where previously approved private sale general housing flats have been subsequently reclassified as "build-to-let" units designated for students. These alterations have taken place without formal acknowledgment as variations to the original Planning application. This situation results in a depletion of much-needed general housing in Leith.

Such actions undermine the trust of our residents and raise substantial questions about the fairness of the Planning process. Therefore, LCCC respectfully requests that the Planning department conduct a formal investigation into this particular application.

We urge the Planning department to adopt a more transparent and inclusive approach when considering such changes. This includes ensuring that the community's interests are upheld and that any modifications adhere to established procedures, such as notifying the public and permitting public comments via the Planning portal.

5. Transparency in Decision-Making

The rationale behind Planning decisions should be made more transparent. It would be beneficial for the Council to provide detailed explanations for both approvals and rejections of Planning applications, helping residents understand why certain decisions were made.

Enhancing transparency and community involvement in the Planning process is not just a matter of good governance but also a means to build trust between the local government and the residents it serves. By implementing these suggestions, the City of Edinburgh Council can ensure that the Planning process becomes more democratic, fair, and accountable.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these concerns further and explore potential solutions with the Planning department. Your attention to these matters would go a long way in fostering a sense of community engagement and trust in the Planning process.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response and the opportunity to collaborate towards a more transparent and community-focused Planning process in Edinburgh.

Kind regards,

Pierre Forissier

On behalf of Leith Central Community Council