

Northfield and Willowbrae Community Council

Engagement Report April 2024-March 2025

Background

At the beginning of 2024, the Community Council's aim was to build on the progress made in the previous year and continue to find opportunities to engage with residents throughout the community council area and listen to their concerns.

April 2024

A Coffee Morning on the Saturday 6th gave more opportunities to consult attendees using the Local Place Standard Questionnaire.

An evening walkabout with residents of Lady Nairne was attended by about ten people and provided useful information about what residents liked and disliked about living there. Suggestions were made about future development of small plots of communal land and the need for more shops and a community meeting space or café. Problems with parking and the lack of the bus service for the elderly were highlighted, but people in general felt a strong sense of connection to the area.

On the 24th, the Engagement Officer (EO) was given the opportunity of a personal meeting with the consultants employed by CEC to consider the feasibility of reinstating the 69 bus service and was able to present the preferred route drawn up by a number of elderly residents and their preferences for its frequency of operation.

May

A similar walkabout was advertised in Piershill and although poorly attended, once again produced useful insights for our Local Place Plan (LPP). A further meeting was held with staff from the Multi-Cultural Family Base (MCFB) to explore options for using the Community Centre for a women's group and a consultation session using the Place Plan Tool was held at the Arts Space in St Margaret's House.

June

A third walkabout in Northfield was organised and resulted in a decision to mark the 100th anniversary of the completion of the estate by planting a tree in Northfield Circus. A resident of the Circus offered to provide a sapling taken from the famous Birnham oak and plans were made to apply for a grant to provide an interpretation board detailing the history of the area. (This was submitted to CEC Community Grants Panel in December 2024 and was deferred due to large number of applications, but decision should be known in May 2025.)

At the Coffee Morning another eight residents came to complete the Place Plan Questionnaire and had the chance to meet the Labour candidate Chris Murray who paid us an unexpected visit.

A hustings meeting for the General Election was organised jointly with Portobello CC in Portobello Town Hall to which all candidates were invited.

July/August

During the holiday months, our efforts centred around preparations for the Environment Fair in September and contacts were made with many local groups

about their involvement. Invitations were sent to local schools to contribute musical items and to advertise the event through their newsletters.

More online questionnaires were completed, a number were handed out to local businesses and to the mother and toddler group at the Community Centre. We continued to liaise with Police around Anti-Social Behaviour near Northfield Community Centre and traffic issues.

September

This year's event was our biggest yet and attracted a much wider range of participants. The addition of stalls -artists and craftspeople from the Artspace at Meadowbank, women's groups from the MCFB and Bridgend Farm selling jams and chutneys, and donated books, bric-a-brac and toys was very popular as was the music provided by the Down's Syndrome Scotland Choir, Parson's Green Primary School Choir and Scottish Duo, Mike McGeary and June Nelson. As well as our usual environmental and community groups, this year attractions for kids included U-Think who provided free Pizza and outdoor games, the Fire Brigade and their engine, craft and henna hand painting sessions and puppet stories.

In addition, one room contained a display of photographs of all our local shops and businesses, as well as several areas for potential future developments or contentious traffic/transport issues. These were accompanied by questions seeking views for the Local Place Plan and an invitation to write comments on post-it notes or complete the questionnaire.

October

During the LPP consultations, the Community Council had become aware of an area of disused land, formerly tennis courts, attached to Cavalry Park Playing fields and was informed by a resident living in close proximity of a number of serious issues of anti-social behaviour occurring on a regular basis. It was agreed to hold a site meeting attended by the resident, NWCC EO, PO, Secretary and Cllr Staniforth to gather information about the problems and clarify issues of ownership and responsibility. Following this meeting, it was decided to identify all the relevant parties and invite them to a joint meeting to answer questions on future intentions for the park and seek solutions to some of the problems.

The final Coffee Morning of the year was attended by a resident who drew our attention to road safety issues in Hamilton Terrace and Hamilton Drive at the exit to St John's PS and the entrance to Figgate Park. A leaflet was distributed to all residents of both streets (and Hamilton Park), inviting them to attend the November NWCC meeting to discuss the problems and suggest solutions.

The Centenary Tree Planting event took place in Northfield Circus attended by a number of residents, Community Councillors, and Ward Cllrs Aston and Griffiths. The oldest resident and Cllrs planted the oak tree to reflect 100 years since the first local authority housing in the city was built at Northfield between 1921-24. A report and photographs of the occasion were sent to the Portobello Reporter and Duddingston Direct.

November

The November meeting of NWCC was attended by 8 residents of Hamilton Drive and Terrace who agreed that road safety was a concern and also drew attention to parking issues but they did not favour closure of the road as a through-route. It was agreed that NWCC would request a site meeting with Council Officers, preferably in the morning when children were arriving for school and that residents would be invited to attend.

A long-standing complaint to the CEC about a damaged wall in Meadowfield Avenue had been pursued on behalf of residents by NWCC. The EO met with the newly appointed Council Housing Officer to explain the history, visit the site with owners and press the case for action.

The PO and EO had an online meeting with the developers of the proposed additional Student Accommodation at the Ball Room Pool Hall next to the approved site at Jock's Lodge and were able to examine their draft plans and convey some of the concerns of residents.

December

The EO participated in a Promotional event for Community Councils at Craigmillar Library to highlight the purpose of Community Councils and promote their achievements.

The PO and EO met with a representative of the Scottish Wildlife Trust on site at Cavalry Park to discuss land ownership and ASB issues in connection with the scheduled January meeting of stakeholders.

The new 69 bus Service started and was accompanied on its first journey by several grateful elderly Lady Nairne residents who had campaigned for its reinstatement.

The site meeting took place at Hamilton Terrace/Drive and several residents joined us as well as Portobello Ward Cllr Kate Campbell. Suggestions included raising the speed bumps, narrowing the entrance at Duddingston Road and improving enforcement of parking and speeding regulations. Council Officers agreed to cost various options and to report back by the March Community Council meeting.

January 2025

Briefing papers, agenda and questions were sent out in advance of the meeting for Cavalry Park which was held on the 28th and attended by eighteen stakeholders. It was evident that there were some competing interests around the use of the area and the finance available to maintain it, but a respectful discussion took place, and a number of actions agreed to be costed and worked on this year by Ward Councillors, Council Officers, Edinburgh Leisure and NWCC. The meeting also involved the local resident, Duddingston Amenity Society, Scottish Wildlife Trust and Portobello Rugby Club reps. All parties agreed to continue to engage and attend a further meeting if required later in the year.

Around 900 flyers were delivered in Willowbrae, highlighting the work of Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust -Tree Time initiative. An opportunity for planting new trees was identified in Abercorn Crescent and twelve trees were planted with the

help of E&LGT and schoolchildren from Parson's Green Primary School Eco Committee. This was funded by 'Tree-Time' and some local donations as part of the 'Million-Tree-City' Campaign.

February

PO and EO met with Parent Council at Royal High Primary to discuss possible improvements to the external derelict school garden abutting Baronscourt Park, the recent anti-social behaviour issues and to promote the Local Place Plan.

A public meeting was held to promote the forthcoming Community Council elections and encourage new recruits. Posters, and banners were produced to publicise the event and details were posted on our website and social media. The event resulted in the nomination of two new candidates.

A number of ASB issues around the Community Centre and drug dealing in Piershill were reported by residents and NWCC is continuing to report these and engage with our Community Police Officers.

A number of grant applications were made by NWCC to fund various initiatives including street tree replacement and two heritage information boards. A bench was installed in Baronscourt Park following a request by elderly residents and a successful bid for funding from CEC. (CEC also funded the path lighting through the park in March after lobbying by surrounding residents following two surveys of local opinions about its usage.)

March

A further site meeting was held at Cavalry Park with the resident, Council Officers and Edinburgh Leisure Staff to discuss new signage, possible CCTV and the resurfacing of the Tennis Court area which had occurred via a nearby CEC community benefit contract.

The EO met informally with four potential new Community Councillors to answer questions and explain the work and value of the role. When the closing date for nominations passed at the end of the month, NWCC were delighted to have received six new nominees as well as five returning members. As this was three short of our total membership, all were duly elected without the necessity to hold an election.

NWCC is greatly encouraged with this result and looks forward to the coming year and the opportunities it brings to extend our activities throughout our area. With new members bringing fresh ideas, greater diversity and a range of interests and contacts, we hope to be able to offer support and serve more of our residents. Our primary purpose is to see that your voice is heard, so we encourage you to attend our meetings, write to tell us what needs to change and share your ideas on how to make our place better for everyone.

Margaret Bennett
Engagement Officer
Northfield & Willowbrae Community Council

May 2025

