



The Cockburn Association: Our Strategy

Introduction

The Cockburn Association is one of the oldest conservation organisations in Europe, dedicated to caring for the whole of Edinburgh and its setting. The objectives of the Association are to:

- Promote the conservation and enhancement of Edinburgh's landscape and historic and architectural heritage
- Encourage high quality contemporary design for buildings that enhances their surroundings
- Promote improvement of the aesthetic and functional quality of shared spaces such as public squares, streets and pavements
- Support the protection of the Green Belt, important open spaces and good agricultural land from unsuitable development
- Encourage the development and proper use of sustainable transport systems, with priority given to public transport, cycling and pedestrian environments
- Encourage greater public interest and involvement in planning, conservation and design

These objectives are built on a number of core beliefs and values that guide our work:

- The Stern Report and other research make it clear that we need to change our behaviour radically if we are to create a sustainable future
- Protecting our city's amenity is beneficial to the quality of life, good health and well-being of all citizens
- We have a strong social agenda, believing that the vitality and prosperity of any city stems from its variety of citizens and their special interests, and that we have a duty to give a voice to the under-represented
- The present is a continuum with the past and the same broad values which shaped Edinburgh's spectacular townscape still hold true. The modern era is no different from any other
- There is no conflict between the needs for growth and a desire to protect what we have inherited; rather, we believe the two are intrinsically linked and that sustaining our unique townscape is central to our future prosperity

1 The Strategic Review

A strategic review was carried out by an independent consultant in late 2014, based on interviews with external stakeholders, staff and Council members. It concluded that the Association needs to:

- Focus on doing less in more depth
- Concentrate on activities which have the potential to make a difference
- Ensure that the scope of our work is realistic in terms of our time and financial resources
- Enhance our influence and impact we need to work closely with other organisations who share our concerns and aspirations and are keen to work in partnership
- Actively promote a positive vision of a prosperous, healthy and enjoyable Edinburgh and pursue practical solutions

In summary we need to pursue a focused, strategic approach to our work.

The interviews identified strong support for the Cockburn Association and its role. All stakeholders wanted to see Edinburgh as a prosperous, exciting city offering a high quality of life to all of its residents, a great working environment for businesses and a remarkable experience for visitors.

The interviews have identified three specific areas of activity for the Association:

- The Cockburn should retain a ***strong focus on the planning of Edinburgh and its environment***, in terms of strategic planning, transport, townscape and design
- From this work it is likely that the Cockburn will identify significant issues of strategic concern and public interest which would be best addressed as the focus of ***campaigns*** and/or the pursuit of practical solutions
- Both these areas of activity need to be underpinned by a stronger focus on ***awareness and education*** in order to achieve our objective of encouraging greater public interest and involvement in planning, conservation and design

In the rest of this section we describe in more detail how these three areas of activity may need to change or develop.

1.1 Planning and design

1. Our ***Transport Committee*** and ***Strategic Planning and Environment Committee*** have a strong reputation for the quality of their work and well-researched papers. We need to retain a strong focus on strategic planning and develop new ways of working that enhance our influence. This means that:

- We need to keep abreast of, and seek to influence as far as we can, the national planning framework and the development of planning strategy
- We will work with others wherever possible on particular aspects of strategic planning to ensure that the resources are available to deliver strong, well-developed positive visions and cases
- We will focus our time on one or two strategic issues each year and concentrate on those aspects that are of significance to Edinburgh citizens or of clear public interest

2. In the work of the **Cases Committee**, we need to spend more time on **significant development proposals**. These could be significant because of their scale (e.g. St James' Quarter), their setting (e.g. larger developments in conservation areas), or their implications for policy (e.g. developing land in the green belt). What this means in practice is that we will:
 - Meet planners, developers and architects as early as possible in the evolution of development projects
 - Build alliances around developments to ensure that the case for world class design is made as strongly as possible.
 - Ensure that our contribution is proportionate to the significance of the development and make all our contributions public through our website.
 - Create small short-life teams for each significant development made up of the right expertise and experience.
3. We will work with partners to help them fulfil their roles and to enhance our impact. This means we will work with:
 - **Amenity and other associations** to help them – where needed – gain the capacity and knowledge to respond to local planning applications in their areas. Over time we will move to a position where we will not scan planning applications in these areas but the amenity association or Community Council will be able to call on our help if it is needed. What this means in practice is that we will:
 - Discuss this approach with our current amenity association and Community Council members and identify those who wish to take responsibility for identifying and responding to local applications and feel confident in doing so
 - Work with others such as Planning Aid to ensure that training and support is available for those associations or Community Councils who are Cockburn members and who don't yet feel in a position to carry out this role, with the intention of helping them gain the knowledge they need to do this
 - Work with the Planning Department to help them provide a clear and accessible service to each of these areas
 - **Interest groups and specialist organisations** on particular issues and projects and use the combination of resources to enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes
 - Where possible and appropriate we will aim to establish agreements with all these organisations setting out the respective roles and expectations of each party
4. We will develop, communicate and publish **evidence based policies** on a range of topics. These will establish a clear statement of our views that developers and architects can take into account, and ensure that we are presenting clear, coherent and well justified responses. These policies will be developed gradually over time and refreshed as necessary. We will identify some priority areas for early action.

1.2 Campaigns

Our work on strategic planning or significant applications is likely to raise issues that we need to campaign about. This could be about a particular improvement or enhancement, a particular application, an aspect of a number of applications, or a proposed change in strategic planning policy. In practice, we will:

- Whenever possible, focus on one campaign at a time, though we recognise that issues/applications will occur which require a campaigning response
- Identify campaign topics which further our objectives and which we feel we can make a difference to. Where appropriate, we will seek to work with partners to propose practical solutions to situations where there may be significant risk to the townscape or setting of Edinburgh
- As a matter of course, seek to work with others, which may include amenity associations or Community Councils which are directly affected, or other organisations which share our concerns and aspirations

1.3 Encouraging greater public interest and involvement

A significant response from those interviewed was the need to devote more effort on raising awareness and engagement in education. The Association is currently responsible for organising Edinburgh Doors Open Day (though many visitors do not realise this) and we organise a number of events which help to enhance understanding and awareness of aspects of Edinburgh for members. There is scope to build on this and we need to focus on a small number of actions if we are to make progress. These could include:

- Building on Edinburgh Doors Open Day and ensuring that the Cockburn's leadership and management of this is much clearer
- Raising funding for a wider range of events for members and others
- Engaging with Edinburgh University and Heriot Watt University to attract the interest and skills of students in the strategic, planning and design issues facing Edinburgh and provide a source of support and contributions to the aims and work of the Cockburn
- Drawing together experts on key policy issues to develop new thinking and raise awareness of alternative solutions
- Supporting action in schools in Edinburgh which help young people gain insights into the history, design and planning of Edinburgh

2 How should we go about our work?

We have also identified some required shifts in **how** we work and communicate. We are a small organisation and we need to find ways of further enhancing our influence and impact by **working with allies, strengthening our membership base, and broadening the constituency** of 'those who love Edinburgh' through awareness and education. We have identified the following **five principles** which should underpin our approach and strategy:

- **Independent:** we need to be an organisation of integrity which is seen as independent of vested interests in terms of strategy, developments and campaigns
- **Transparent and accessible:** we need to be open about what we are doing and why, and how we go about our business. We need to be seen to be welcoming of all, and run the organisation in a way which attracts a wide range of people who support our objectives and can contribute to our work. We will:

- Ensure that there is high awareness of how to become actively involved in to the work of the Cockburn, through the Cockburn Council and its committees or in other ways, and that we are clear about the skills and experience that we need at any time
- Use our website actively to post Committee agendas and outcomes and build on our current use of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other social media to link into it
- **Working in partnership:** wherever possible we will work with others to strengthen our influence and share the load, and we will build a range of constructive relationships with complementary organisations. The role of the Cockburn may vary from leading specific campaigns and attracting support, through working in partnership with others, to acting as a coordinator and facilitator of joint action (as with the Edinburgh Civic Forum)
- **Using an approach based on evidence:** we will base our campaigns, initiatives and commentary on well-justified insights, expert contributions and robust evidence
- **Learning and review:** we will regularly review our progress and impact and adjust our focus and programme accordingly, and as an organisation we will learn from our actions, influence and impact and draw on this to ensure we regularly improve our internal systems, the quality of our relationships and our impact

3 Resources and Governance

We plan to devote more time to strategy, major developments, campaigns and some focused initiatives. In the short term this may increase the demands on our time and resources. This means that:

- The way in which Council Members are elected should send a strong signal about our openness and accessibility. We need to use this open process of recruitment to set out our specific needs in terms both of expertise and experience, and members who are able to devote time to aspects of our work
- We need to ensure we are able to draw on the insights of 'lay' Members and attract volunteers who want to contribute to our specific initiatives
- We need to strengthen the leadership role and professionalism of our Council members and staff to ensure strong team working and best use of resources with proper delegation of responsibility, clear accountability, and timely decision-making and implementation
- We need to increase our membership and fully draw on the expertise and experience of members
- We need to develop our IT infrastructure in a way that ensures it is much more robust and accessible, and supports a stronger 'learning organisation'
- We need to create a transition and implementation plan that shows clearly how we will move to a sustainable position in terms of activity and resources

Cockburn Council

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