

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



February 2023

Remembering Barry Martin

I want to begin by offering my heartfelt condolences once again to the family, friends and colleagues of firefighter Barry Martin, who lost his life in the line of duty last week.

It's in tragic circumstances such as these that we're reminded of the immense bravery and selflessness of those in our emergency services – putting their lives on the line day in, day out to keep us safe.

On spending some time outside the former Jenners' store, I was deeply moved at the many floral tributes and messages left by members of the public and the Fire and Rescue Service.

It's hugely important that, as a city, we honour Barry's sacrifice, and the Lord Provost and I have written to the Chief Fire Officer to pass on our condolences and commit the Council's full support in ensuring a fitting and lasting memorial.

A fairer deal for our Capital City

My drive to address the issues that matter most to the people of Edinburgh remains every bit as strong as when I took office last May. And I'm proud of the way we've worked constructively with other political groups over the last nine months to drive forward the Business Plan and the improvements we want to make to our services.

We'll need this spirit of improved collaboration as we tackle major issues in the months ahead, not least the Council's finances. We've made good progress since the start of our budget-setting journey last year but – as demonstrated by the [publication of the final set of savings proposals](#) aimed at closing our £76m budget gap – there's still work to be done.

It's an inescapable fact that Edinburgh remains the lowest funded local authority in Scotland and, together with council leaders across the country, I've repeatedly called on Ministers to provide a fairer settlement for local government. With the Scottish budget continuing to be debated at Holyrood into next week, I repeat this plea once again.

Despite this, and the difficult decisions that lie in front of us, I remain hopeful that we can find a positive way forward and set a balanced budget on 23 February – a fair, sustainable budget that works for the people of Edinburgh and reflects the priorities laid out in our Business Plan.

Marking a year of our support for Ukraine

I won't tire of describing the immense pride I feel in the welcome our city and its residents have provided to the 10,000+ Ukrainians who've arrived here since the Russia's illegal invasion a year ago – or of recognising the immense human cost that Ukrainians have endured as they continue to fight for their freedom.

Late last year, we [welcomed a delegation from our sister city Kyiv](#) and were [recognised alongside the Ukrainian community](#) for the immense support provided over the past year. The Lord Provost and I then joined Edinburgh Ukrainian Club Chair, Hannah Beaton-Hawryluk, the Ukrainian Consul General and other members of the Ukrainian community to [plant a ceremonial tree on behalf of the late HM The Queen](#) on Calton Hill.

As we count down to the anniversary on 24 February, we're continuing to work closely with Edinburgh's Ukrainian community and our third sector partners to plan a fitting programme of events. A night of music with Scottish and Ukrainian artists at the [Usher Hall](#), a fundraiser for Hospitallers paramedic charity at the [Scottish Storytelling Centre](#) and a wreath laying at the City War Memorial on the Royal Mile are amongst those already confirmed – with more to come in the coming weeks.

Putting the green back into Greendykes

Edinburgh's need for quality affordable housing has never been more urgent, and we've made a major commitment as a Council to ramp up the creation of new social homes.

I was delighted, then, that councillors agreed [a number of reports](#) last week which spearhead exactly that – allowing us to press ahead with another 200 homes, of which at least 130 will be available for social rent.

As part of this, we've approved plans to *put the green back into Greendykes* – using innovative approaches to transform a derelict site into sustainable net zero homes. This will involve offsite manufacturing and designing heat sources, which will help people to keep their fuel bills down as well as their carbon emissions.

Meanwhile, at Murrayburn Gate we've agreed to create over 100 affordable homes where the Wester Hailes Health Centre once stood. Over in Dreghorn, we've also negotiated the purchase of empty properties from the MOD which we'll convert into additional quality Council homes.

Tram project leads the way for Edinburgh's bold transport vision

It's only a matter of months until we complete the [tram line to Newhaven](#) – a huge milestone for the city – and I'm delighted that we're still on track to start serving the public on time and within the £207m budget. The route is really taking shape – all of the tracks are in the ground, tram stops are in place and, in the coming weeks, the full line will be electrified in preparation for testing.

I'm pleased to say that by mid-February we'll also be reopening Leith Walk to two-way traffic – I know this will be most welcome to the people who live and work there.

I'd like to thank residents and local businesses for their patience and perseverance throughout the works. I'm confident that this part of Edinburgh – and beyond – will reap the benefits of the completed line. We're already seeing a range of new business and development ventures popping up on the route, from traders occupying the newly refurbished Stead's Place building on Leith Walk to the waterfront neighbourhood planned for Ocean Terminal – positive signs of things to come.

Creating a better connected, environmentally friendly transport system is essential for a modern, successful city and we've just approved plans to consult on a [range of ambitious draft action plans](#) to transform the way we move around. These blueprints for active travel, public transport, parking, air quality and road safety are central to our transition towards a lower traffic, more liveable, healthy and sustainable place. We'll soon be seeking your views on our proposals – so watch this space.

Promoting tolerance, understanding and respect

Earlier this week, [I marked the start of LGBT+ History Month](#), which celebrates lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and non-binary history annually. It's important to reflect on the past but just as important to acknowledge how the LGBT+ community continues to re-write the history books.

I'm proud that Edinburgh is a diverse, welcoming city that embraces all sections of society and celebrates difference.

While social acceptance of those who identify as LGBT+ has, thankfully, increased over recent decades, discrimination is sadly all too common. Any kind of attack on anyone because of their sexual orientation or transgender identity, or their race, religion or disability, is abhorrent, and, on behalf of the whole Council, I repeat my call for tolerance, understanding and respect right across our city.

Saving Gorgie Farm

Like many others, I was sad and disappointed when Gorgie Farm was forced to close its doors in January. It was such an important community asset, not just for the local area but everyone across the city, and we're working hard to find a positive way forward.

I was encouraged, then, by the constructive nature of committee discussions this week. It was really [powerful to hear from Save Gorgie Farm Forever](#) and local members about the value of the Farm to both visitors and the many volunteers, especially those with learning difficulties, who gained so much from their time and experiences there. We heard that, for some, it was a genuine lifeline.

I'm getting a real sense of a community-led coalition forming that can come together to find a workable and sustainable solution – ensuring the Farm remains affordable and accessible while offering valuable volunteering and educational opportunities for many more years to come.

Winterwatch 2023

Finally, it was fantastic to see Edinburgh featured so heavily in this year's series of the BBC's [Winterwatch](#).

The presenters repeatedly referenced just how much green space there is for us to enjoy in the Capital and championed the interconnected off-road paths, the river flowing through the city and the incredible amount of wildlife right on our doorstep. If you didn't tune in, you can catch up on [BBC website and iPlayer](#).

We remain committed to protecting our greenspace and wildlife and, through our [partnership with Fields in Trust](#), we're aiming for everyone to be within a ten-minute walk of a protected green space, ensuring that our residents are guaranteed opportunities for activity, play, learning and community.

At a Holyrood reception next week, we will join Fields in Trust to call for other local authorities, businesses and communities to collaborate and back the innovative partnership to protect our green spaces and secure better access to them for generations to come.

Get involved

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