



Council Leader's Report

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• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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COP26 – time for change

In just over a week's time, world leaders will assemble in Glasgow for the [landmark COP26 summit](#) to address the urgent need to tackle climate change, and the devastating effects it could have on our planet.

Here in Edinburgh, we're facing up to the climate change emergency. We were the first – and so far still the only – Scottish Council to sign up to the [Civic Charter on Climate](#), which emerged from the pioneering national Climate Assembly work, and are already taking substantive local action towards our [commitment to become a net-zero city by 2030](#).

We're delivering a whole range of projects and initiatives to support our climate target – from schemes to encourage and support sustainable travel and [becoming a Million Tree City](#), to planned investment in greener Council buildings, and much more.

Next month, we'll be publishing the final draft of the [2030 Climate Strategy](#), which lays out the actions needed to meet our 2030 net-zero goal. These are the kind of changes we must make to build a resilient, liveable city for future generations.

In terms of COP26, we've been gearing up to support the smooth running of this pivotal event for over 18 months, working closely with the UK and Scottish Governments, Police Scotland and local transport providers.

While it's being hosted in Glasgow, we're expecting it to be busy right across the central belt, including here in Edinburgh, and we want to keep the city moving and open for business. We're encouraging people to plan ahead, consider how and if they need to travel and to avoid peak times if possible – [visit our dedicated website for up-to-date travel information](#).

A cleaner, greener transport future for Edinburgh

One of the key contributors to our carbon footprint is transport: here in Edinburgh road traffic accounts for almost a third of carbon emissions. One of the best ways of limiting this is to encourage and facilitate the switch from private car journeys to more sustainable modes of travel, whether that's walking, wheeling, cycling or public transport.

We have a track record for promoting clean, low-carbon travel – whether that's through championing our Lothian bus service or committing 10% of our transport budget to cycling improvements – and our ten-year [City Mobility Plan](#) envisions more, transformational change to achieve this.

So I was delighted when, earlier this month, the Transport and Environment Committee approved an [updated Active Travel Investment Programme](#), which will see £118m invested in schemes to help people walk, wheel and cycle over the next five years. More than 50 miles of safe cycle routes and an increase in funding to create more accessible pavements are planned, amongst a range of other improvements.

As well as reducing greenhouse gases, this will also lower harmful air pollution associated with road traffic. This will be further supported by our [Low Emission Zone \(LEZ\)](#) that councillors will consider this month ahead of its planned implementation next spring.

The final LEZ, which has been developed following years of careful analysis, modelling and consultation with the public, will limit the most polluting vehicles in the densely populated city centre, with an expected knock-on effect across the city. Everyone has the right to breathe clean air, and we'll be spending the coming months helping people to prepare for these changes, which will benefit generations to come.

Planning for a sustainable future

As well as transport, sustainable planning and development are crucial to Edinburgh's greener future. So I'm very pleased that the city's [next proposed local development plan – City Plan 2030](#) is moving to the 'representations' stage. Our approach in the plan is to use 'brownfield land' to help developers make best use of the finite resources we have available to sustainably accommodate Edinburgh's growing population and help us realise our Net Zero 2030 ambition.

We're asking developers to rise to the challenges of rapid climate change and support the Scottish Government's '20-minute walkable neighbourhood' approach. We want to build new low-energy, vibrant communities around existing transport networks with plenty of active travel options, high-quality affordable homes, with great culture and leisure activities, and educational and health facilities nearby.

The plan also includes proposed policies to limit the number of short-term lets, addressing the well-reported pressures they bring.

Facing up to Edinburgh's past

While we focus on securing Edinburgh's green and sustainable future, we must also make sure we face up to our city's past – the good as well as the bad. I do believe that Edinburgh is one of the most inclusive, diverse and welcoming cities in the world, yet we must always strive to do better.

In July 2020 we agreed a [set of actions to address historic racial injustice and stem modern-day discrimination](#). One of the actions was a commitment to establish an independent review to consider and make recommendations on Edinburgh's slavery and colonialism legacy.

Through the work of the independent Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Group we have an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with ourselves and our communities. I look forward to the launch of the consultation towards the end of October – fittingly, in Black History Month – and to a productive and meaningful dialogue with citizens over the coming months.

Sustainable new coastal town taking shape

Our £1.3bn proposal to build one of the most sustainable new neighbourhoods in Scotland at Granton Waterfront is one of the major 'brownfield' developments in our proposed City Plan 2030.

This project recently took a step forward as [committee agreed an Outline Business Case for the first phase of regeneration in the area](#). Over the next 15 years, 3,500 net-zero carbon homes, a primary school, health centre, commercial and cultural spaces, sustainable transport provision and a new coastal park are all planned.

We're already progressing with the delivery of around 660 Council-led homes and there's been positive progress in growing a cultural and arts cluster. Just last month we announced a [lease for arts charity Edinburgh Palette in our vacant industrial unit on West Shore Road](#), a building which also recently played host to the hugely successful [Hidden Door Festival](#).

Creating Scotland's biggest health innovation district

There's much to be excited about in the south-east of the city too, thanks to the [Edinburgh BioQuarter's ambitious expansion plans](#). The development will create Scotland's biggest health innovation district, with an eventual community of 20,000 people living, working or studying there as part of a vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhood.

The area is already a driving force in Scotland's thriving life sciences sector and a leading destination in the UK for healthcare delivery, ground-breaking medical research and health innovation.

The BioQuarter development is a key part of Edinburgh's economic future. It has the potential to bring in billions of pounds of investment with lasting benefits for local people, connecting jobs, education and opportunities to nearby areas like Greendykes and Craigmillar, where we're also making major investments in regeneration.

Positive progress on poverty

One of our core goals as a city is to eradicate poverty in Edinburgh by the end of the decade so I was encouraged to see the [progress we have made in the past year following the Edinburgh Poverty Commission's call to action](#).

Edinburgh's the first local authority in the UK to set such a target and [tackling poverty and inequality in our city are key planks of our Business Plan](#). Thanks to our additional £2.5m investment we're able to expand our income maximisation services, supporting families to reduce and prevent food and financial insecurity. We also relaunched the Edinburgh Guarantee to help people of all ages and backgrounds into work or learning.

In tandem, we're providing [new homelessness prevention resources](#) to help those at risk of losing their homes, which now also includes the Scottish Government's [Tenant Hardship Fund](#).

Sadly, many still find themselves in homeless situations so I'm pleased to see we're continuing to provide accommodation of last resort, tailored support and positive move-on option advice at our [Welcome Centre at the Haymarket Hub](#). This partnership initiative with Bethany Christian Trust reopened its doors this month for people who so desperately need our help this winter and will be there until May next year.

Wall of sporting honour at new Meadowbank

Our new [Meadowbank Sports Centre](#) will be one of the country's top community sports centres, with some of the most state-of-the-art fitness facilities in the UK. Construction is due to be complete by the end of the year and a space within the new building's atrium has been reserved for a new Wall of Honour, to commemorate members of the public who have made significant contributions to Meadowbank's past and legacy as a sports venue and community facility.

Meadowbank has been an important part of Scotland's sporting history for many years and this is a fantastic way for citizens to pay a lasting tribute to its legacy and the outstanding individuals who have made a positive impact on sport in Edinburgh. Which Meadowbank-connected sporting figures do you think should be remembered and celebrated there for years to come?

Communities, teams and individuals across Edinburgh can [submit nominations for the Wall by Friday 26 November](#).

Music to our ears

It's been a long journey to get here but I'm delighted that a sustainable long-term future has at last been secured for the iconic old Royal High School.

The much-loved building in the heart of our World Heritage Site is to be given a [fresh start as a music school](#) and the new lease holder – the Royal High School Preservation Trust – has committed to the high architectural standards required for its future restoration.

When finalising the lease, we'll also be exploring partnership opportunities with the Trust so we can share knowledge and open up opportunities for musicians, choirs and orchestras from throughout the city. We're committed to making sure as many people as possible can enjoy and benefit from the world-class facilities the trust is planning to provide.

And the next winner of the Edinburgh Award is...

Alexander McCall Smith, the 2020 recipient of the Edinburgh Award, said it was [an accolade that meant more to him than almost any other he'd ever received](#).

The Edinburgh Award is given every year to an exceptional individual who's brought positive national and international attention to Edinburgh. Nominations are now open for 2021 and we need to hear from you: who do you think has really put Edinburgh on the world map this year and made a positive impact on the Capital?

We're incredibly lucky to live in a place that's home to so many brilliant people who are leading lights in their field, from artists and authors to scientists and academics, sportspeople and campaigners.

You can [nominate your chosen winner until 29 October](#) and we plan to announce the winner next month.

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