

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Item No 3

PLANNING COMMITTEE

15 November 2023

DEPUTATION REQUESTS

Subject	Deputation
3.1 In relation to Item 11.1 on the agenda - Conservation and Adaptation	Marchmont and Sciences Community Council (written and verbal submission)

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Deputation to the Planning Committee on 15th November 2023

By Douglas Rogers of the Marchmont and Sciennes Community Council
on behalf of community councils and residents' associations in the Edinburgh area

Reason for deputation

To support the work carried out on the Conservation and Adaptation consultation and connect it with community representatives in order to extend its reach and to support the Edinburgh Council's 2030 climate strategy.

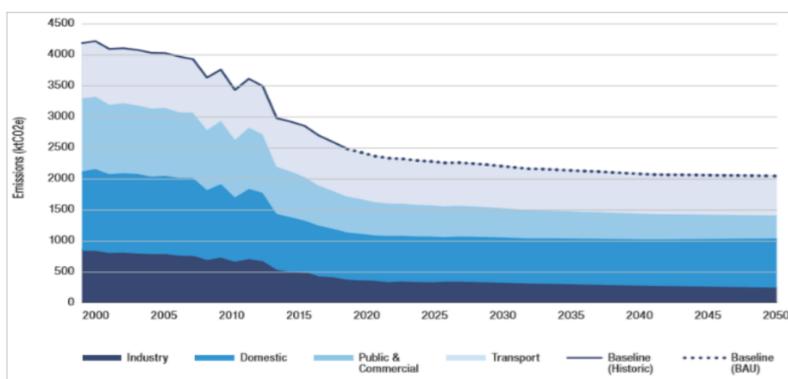
What qualifies me to speak to this issue?

My aim over the last year has been to engage with others in the local communities to reduce our energy usage. I have made contact with other community councils and residents associations, some of which have invited me to give talks. Through this contact, I have also been able to gain feedback from a wider group on their misgivings on improving their properties. I am neither an architect nor a specialist in the field which has allowed me to approach this problem without prejudice. I have informed myself through attending workshops and engaging with specialists in the field.

I am supported in this deputation by my Community Council. I have also received general support for the ideas expressed here by the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils as well as several Community Councils and residents associations.

Background

The City of Edinburgh 2030 climate strategy, predicted in 2021 that without intervention, domestic housing energy usage would rise slightly up to 2050 due to an increased number of houses, see Figure 1. In order to meet the target, a 25% overall reduction in electricity and gas usage would be required.



City emissions have fallen by 42% from 2000, as a result of increasingly decarbonised electricity supply, structural change in the economy and the gradual adoption of more efficient buildings and business processes.

However, projections (including economic, population growth and improvements in energy and fuel efficiency) are that without a significant acceleration in action, city emissions will only fall a further 9% (from 2000 levels) by 2030.

Cumulated emissions reduction potential by scenario. Based on 2050 baseline. A Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for Edinburgh, Place-Based Climate Action Network

Figure 1: Extracted from the council's 2030 Climate Strategy document

Work by Cambridge University¹ has shown that moderate improvements in building insulation tend to increase comfort in the home but doesn't seem to cause a reduction in energy usage in the long term. Therefore, major improvements in our insulation are required if a significant reduction in Edinburgh's energy usage is to be achieved. Houses and tenements built before 1919 were designed to be well ventilated and have thick stone walls which are naturally porous. Radically changing our houses with reduced ventilation along with added insulation requires careful control of humidity throughout the building structure.

¹ Insulation only provides short-term reduction in household gas consumption: University of Cambridge - 1 Jan 2023 <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/insulation-only-provides-short-term-reduction-in-household-gas-consumption-study-of-uk-housing>

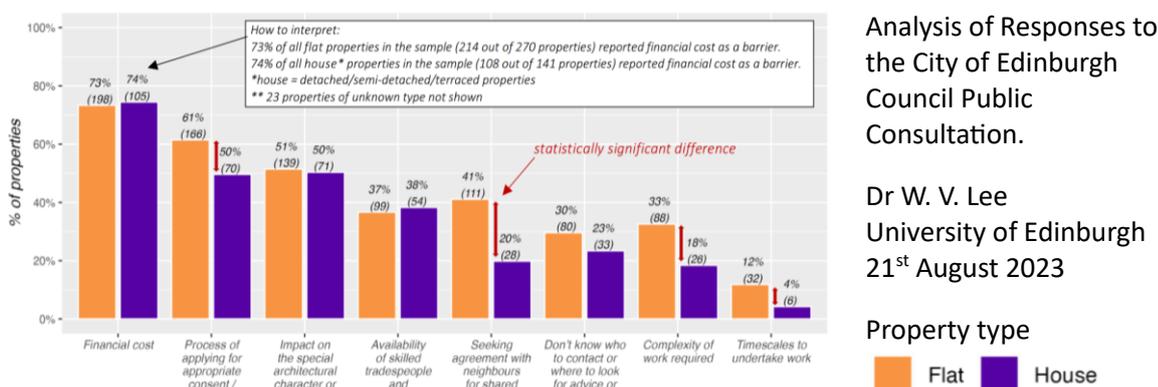
Planning guidance and presumed consent

It was assumed by some that the aim of this consultation was to review the planning guidance for listed buildings and buildings in conservation zones. Changes have already been made between the 2018 and 2022 planning guidance where the wording for the 2022 guidance includes more detailed description of double-glazing options. This guidance needs to be loosened further.

The guidance for conservation zones needs to be separated from that for listed buildings. It also needs to recognise that many buildings were listed before conservation zones were created and if re-assessed would be delisted. While home owners will continue to prioritise window upgrades as this will improve air tightness and prevent condensation on the windows, this will need to be only a small part of the overall insulation improvement if we are to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of our domestic buildings in Edinburgh.

Issues identified during the consultation

The survey results were analysed and presented by Dr Lee to the first workshop, and identified the key reasons that respondents reported as barriers to improving insulation, see Figure 2. This highlighted financing as expected, and that homeowners reticence to impact on historic features of their houses and flats was as significant a barrier as the legislation. The retrofit pilot studies² identified the disruption caused by major insulation upgrades as a significant barrier, not covered in this survey.



Analysis of Responses to the City of Edinburgh Council Public Consultation.

Dr W. V. Lee
 University of Edinburgh
 21st August 2023

Figure 2: Extracted from the report by Dr Lee to the short-term working group

The survey results and first working group discussions suggest that the primary concern was to upgrade windows and reduce draughts.

The second meeting was online and presented the work of Historic Environment Scotland which has done much to develop insulation procedures for listed buildings. However, due to their limited resources, their work is focussed on listed buildings only and other organisations are carrying this work forward including BE-ST in Hamilton and the PasivHaus community who are progressing insulation procedures suitable for retrofitting to pre 1919 houses.

Practical insulation improvements

Sealing the house against draughts through leaky window and doors is fairly easy to achieve with DIY skills at little cost to the home owner. The next step most householders consider is to double glaze their windows either by replacing them or refurbishing the original sashes and installing thin double glazing. This is an area that is easily appreciated. Both can be achieved with minimal impact on the appearance of our houses and little disruption. The low U values required for the EnerPHit standards can be achieved if triple glazed units or vacuum units are used. Many double-glazing companies can also provide finance to spread the cost.

² Energy Efficient Scotland Phase 2 pilots: Final Social Evaluation Report - <https://www.gov.scot/publications>

The biggest unresolved heat loss area that I have identified when talking with local people and visiting their houses, is the poorly insulated roofs. This is particularly difficult to resolve where there is no separate loft area. Even when insulation is fitted when reroofing flat roofs, the thickness is usually well below that deemed necessary by the current building regulations. Insulation of gabled roof sections presents problems of ensuring adequate ventilation in order to ensure that the roof structure remains dry and rot free.

Wall insulation is an issue that conservationists should be concerned about as many solutions would require the removal of elaborate cornices and skirting boards. Insulation to an acceptable standard is possible though with a higher U value than would normally be expected. Sealing the remaining thermal breaks due to areas behind shutters and along the party walls also needs to be considered.

As we improve air tightness, we must ensure that we have sufficient changes of air to keep moisture levels down and maintain a healthy environment. Our houses will then need to include mechanical ventilation where heat recovery systems could significantly reduce heat loss.

Improving all our homes to meet even the lowest EnerPHit certification standard is not practical in the proposed time scale. Promoting a high level of insulation will be required as an essential part of meeting Edinburgh Council's 2030 target.

Request to committee

The conservation and adaptation consultation identified the need for information and guidance to householders. We propose that a booklet is produced and that it is distributed in areas with pre 1919 houses. This would provide practical advice to householders on how to insulate their properties to a high standard. It would also provide links to the following services provided by the council or others:

- Ways to access finance including insulation specific loans and mortgages – the source of this finance will need to be from private finance underwritten by the government
- Access to specialists that will provide independent advice and are able to provide quality support during both the design and installation of any insulation improvements. Ideally these would be council funded in the first instance and have a fixed payment mechanism when overseeing the work. Combining these roles would be highly desirable.
- Online database of standard insulation upgrades appropriate to houses built before 1919, with details of houses suitable for this procedure. These improvements when associated with specific housing types, could then be given automatic planning consent and building warrant approval.

Douglas Rogers
Marchmont and Sciennes Community Council