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Dear Sir/Madam

Re Open Space Strategy and Draft Action Plan for Leith Neighbourhood Partnership Area

Thank you for inviting comment from Greener Leith on the above documents. Our response with regards to the Leith area follows below.

Leith Western Harbour Central Park

It is unfortunate that the delivery of this public space is reliant entirely on developer contributions from housing nearby. We would urge the planning department to insist on the delivery of this park as early as possible in the development of the Western Harbour area, when negotiating on planning permission and section 75 consents. Given the current state of the property market, it could be decades before this park is completed.

Leith Docks Central Park

Greener Leith notes that this site is also the proposed site for a large Biomass Power plant, with a full application pending from Forth Energy. Whilst Greener Leith does not support the construction of such a large plant on this site, should it receive planning consent, we urge the City of Edinburgh council to ensure that an equivalent or larger greenspace area is provided by Forth Ports on the docks area, and developed concurrently with the power plant.

Leith Links Seaward Extension

The timescale for delivery on this space are likely to be measured in decades given the current economic climate. It is also likely to be negatively affected by the Forth Energy Biomass plant proposals, discussed above, or other industrial uses of the docks, as this may entail the continued use of the railway lines that bisect the site.

Given that the seaward extension is only likely to be completed in the very distant future, we would wish that the Open Space Strategy notes, and support, the recent moves to design and deliver a Sandport place - Portobello active travel route that would run through Leith Links. This route is likely to be achievable in shorter timescales than the Leith section of the waterfront promenade.

It is our understanding that the southern end of the seaward extension may be delivered earlier as a first phase, and consequently there may therefore be scope to revisit the proposed design of this area to consider the integration of this active travel route into the wider design of this part of the extension.

Leith Links

The action plan for this park carries very little detail and we would have liked to have seen the Park Improvement Plan supplied alongside this document.

We note that Leith Links is the poorest quality of all 'Premier Parks' in Edinburgh, with the oldest play equipment (PY210), poor quality path surfaces, and an eye sore, disused tennis courts (TC35) area. It is also widely acknowledged that there is an oversupply of bowling greens (BG67) in the park, and that funding for a detailed review and redesign of the facilities in the western section of the links is urgently required (PG 126 & PG 127).

Indications from the CEC neighbourhood survey also show that local residents' satisfaction with parks in the area is decreasing.

Therefore, whilst it is a laudable aim to seek to raise the quality of the park from 'fair' to 'good' we do not believe that this aim is ambitious enough in itself.

There is no mention of the strategic priorities for development of Leith Links that were identified by the Leith Links Ask consultation, undertaken by Greener Leith in 2008 (with the funding and support of the Leith Neighbourhood Partnership).

There is also no acknowledgement of the contribution that both Leith Links Community Council and Greener Leith have made in improving the park to date.

We would wish to see a commitment from the City of Edinburgh Council to upgrade the facilities in the park in line with the priorities identified by the Leith Links Ask and in consultation with the Leith Links Action Group.

Given the level of community involvement in Leith Links we would wish to see the council work with local stakeholders to achieve Green Flag status for Leith Links too.

Bothwell Street

Greener Leith welcomes moves to improve this small amenity space.

Edinburgh Promenade

The delivery of a continuous waterfront promenade is not likely to be complete until 2038 at the earliest. In fact, it is likely to be much later given the current economic situation.

Given this, we urge the City of Edinburgh Council to support an alternative East-West active travel link that will link the Western end of Portobello promenade with the North Edinburgh cycle network at Sandport Place via the disused railway that runs from Seafield St to Leith Links. Our own consultation shows that this is strongly supported by local residents.

This will help to support Edinburgh's ambitious targets to boost cycling and walking in the city and we believe that this route provides a realistic and achievable alternative that may be completed within the lifetime of at least some of Leith's current residents.

SUSTRANS have provided funding for the detailed design and costing of this link, and Greener Leith hopes to work with both SUSTRANS and the City of Edinburgh Council to fund the path upgrades required by this work.

Disused Railway Network between Lochend Road and Seafield Road.

Greener Leith supports proposals to improve the quality of this route. The most significant problem affecting this area is antisocial behaviour, spanning litter, graffiti, dog-fouling, vandalism, fire raising, illegal motor bike use, and fly-tipping.

Many of these problems could be remedied by improving the management, policing and maintenance of this area. In recent years, Greener Leith and Leith Links Community Council have both organised community clean-up events in this area with a view to encouraging better maintenance of the area.

We would wish to see more commitment in the Open Space Strategy to upgrade the quality of the path surfaces on this route, and to improve access and connections to the surrounding residential areas.

A Green Bridge over Leith Walk

With regards to the network in the East of the city, we have identified from our own consultation work that there is considerable local support for developing a 'Green Bridge' link between Pilrig Park (PG121 & NAT110), and Thorntree Street utilising the disused railway infrastructure that runs parallel to Manderston Street and Jane Street. This in turn would link with the disused railway green space network to the east (GRE 179). Several local architects and SUSTRANS have also supported this proposal - and given the impact that similar projects such as the New York 'high line' project and the Tower Hamlets 'Mile End' parks - we believe it is an idea worth pursuing.

Whilst we acknowledge that this proposal is ambitious, we would wish to see a detailed design and feasibility study undertaken to ascertain the scope for a development of this nature included in the Open Space Strategy.

Powderhall and/or Abbeyhill Railway

The development of these green corridors is to be welcomed, and will provide the south and east of Leith with a useful active travel network to complement that in the west. The improvement in this network is important, as there the tram will make Leith Walk more unattractive to cyclists, and the provision of safe alternative routes will become more important.

However, the lack of timescales and identified funding sources is regrettable. As we've noted previously, it is unfortunate that private developers are often able to leave their Section 75 obligations to deliver public realm improvements until after the last building work is completed. Also, these routes may only come to fruition by agreement with Network Rail.

It is not clear from the action plan diagrams whether there will be a direct link through the Lochend Butterfly Project, between the Abbeyhill green corridor and the disused railway path that runs from Easter Rd to Seafield Rd.

Given this we believe that there may be a 'quick win' available in improving the path surfaces and links between Easter rd (GRE179), Hawkhill avenue, Lochend park (PY10 & PG13) and Meadowbank to provide a further active travel route. To date, Greener Leith has secured investment from the Leith Neighbourhood Partnership to improve the Easter Rd end of this route. However, completion would require the modification of the pedestrian crossing on Hawkhill avenue (that has never worked since it was installed), some minor path upgrades in Lochend park and possibly the addition of cycle lanes on Marionville Road. Some signage to give the route an identify would then be welcome too.

Greener Leith would wish to see a commitment to deliver this 'interim' route included in the Open Space Strategy.

North Edinburgh Path Network

The North Edinburgh Path Network is a much loved resource, and a key factor in increasing levels of active travel in the neighbourhood, not to mention the roles these green spaces play in promoting biodiversity.

We know from our own consultation, that one of the key issues that discourage greater public use of the path network is the perception that they are blighted by antisocial behaviour, litter and, in some places, dog fouling. We would wish to see a commitment to improve the maintenance and management of these areas in order to encourage more people to use the paths.

We would support any initiative to improve links between Pilrig Park and the North Edinburgh Park Network. For example, path links between the Water of Leith and West Bowling Street (GRE 191) would benefit from improvement.

Kirkgate Civic Space

Greener Leith would wish to see improvement plans for this civic space included in the Open Space Strategy.

With regards to the Kirkgate, we would wish to see a commitment to promoting a cycle route through the Kirkgate, connecting the foot of Leith Walk and the tram stop there, with the proposed new active travel route between Sandport Place - Portobello Promenade discussed above.

Active travel modes could also be promoted throughout the Kirkgate area by installing more drop kerbs on the surrounding streets and removing obstacles such as the prominent utility box that blocks the entrance to the newly formed ramp into the kirkgate from Queen Charlotte Street.

We have also campaigned in the past for improvements to the public art provision in the Kirkgate. We believe that there is broad public support to remove the poor quality 'unicorns horn' at the Foot of the Walk, and to replace it with better quality public art.

Proposed Allotment Extensions in Pilrig Park and St Marks Park.

Greener Leith strongly opposes both proposed allotment site extensions. Both areas are valuable public access green spaces, and are well used for informal recreation. Leith already has the lowest amount of accessible open space per person in the city. Developing these areas as allotment sites would essentially 'privatise' them and reduce the amount of accessible open space further.

Historically, we are led to believe that the office building that lies to the north of Pilrig Park was built on a former allotment site. Given that the office building has now lain vacant for some time, perhaps it would be more appropriate to return that site to allotments, rather than lose more precious public green space?

Whilst we appreciate that there is a growing demand for allotment provision, we believe that this demand should be accommodated within new private developments or from a reduction in other green space types where there may be over provision - for example municipal golf courses. Locally, Craightinny Golf Course (GC1) may be a possible site that could accommodate more allotments.

Greener Leith also supports council initiatives that would allow more people to get involved in growing their own food. For example, more promotion of local community gardens at Redbraes and Persevere, and more support and advice for people who wish to make more use of their common back greens.