Merchiston Districts Community Council

Marchmont / Sciennes Community Council

Our Neighbourhood in 2040

Our Local Place Plan: preparing Merchiston, Fountainbridge, Bruntsfield, Marchmont and Sciennes for a changing climate.

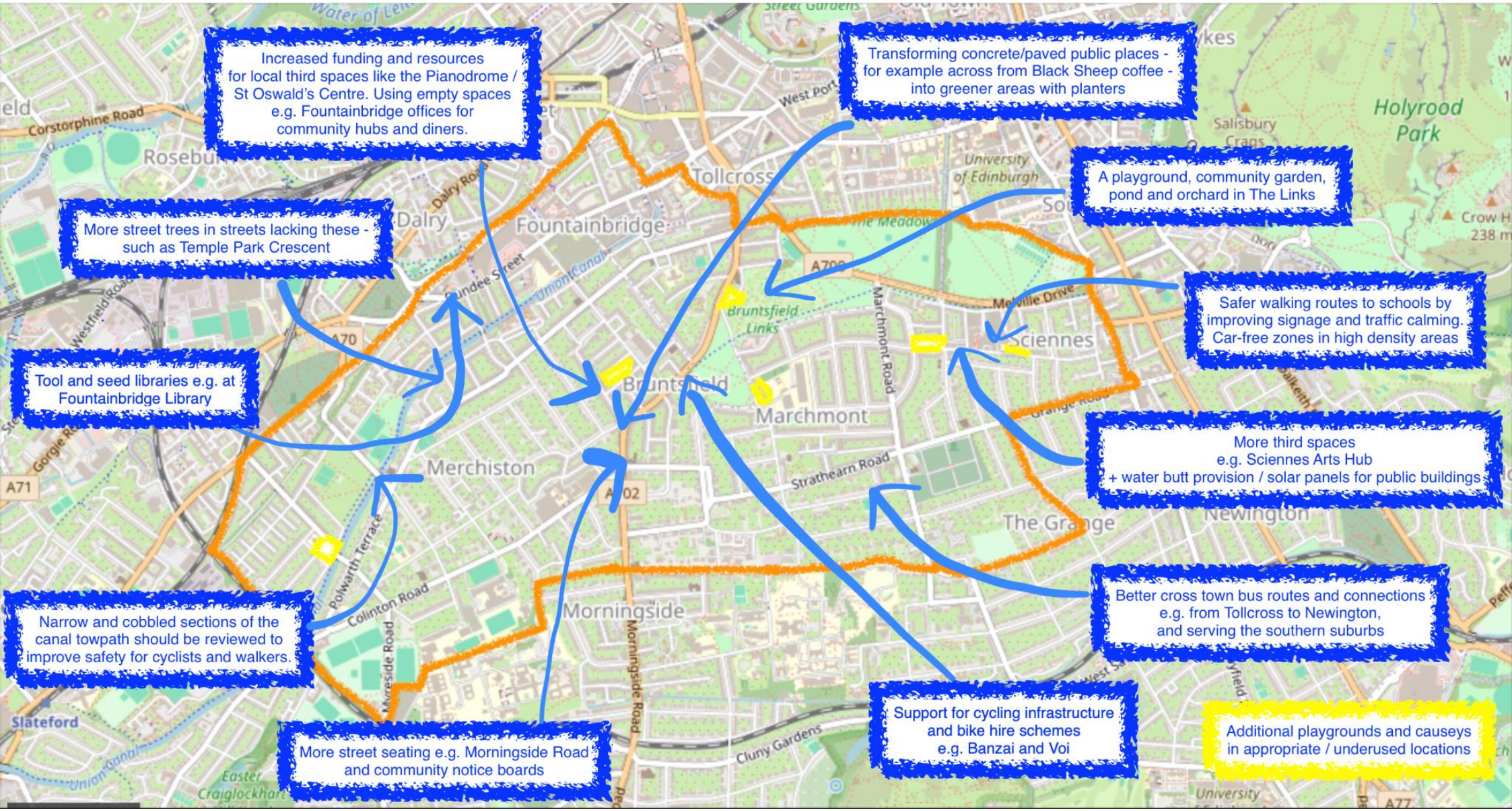
How to describe our part of South Central Edinburgh? A residential area? A green haven? We ran a community-led enquiry to ask our neighbours what they currently enjoy and what they would like to see in the next 15 years for the area they live, work or socialise in.

In response, residents and visitors alike value the well established neighbourhoods and proximity to the city centre while enjoying access to large parks. The main future concern we heard was the lack of preparedness in response to the climate and nature crises. Respondents felt that the area was missing a **holistic approach**. As a result, we have developed the following plan. **From the community of South Central Edinburgh to the City of Edinburgh Council**:

1. The **City Plan 2040** **should be radically re-framed** as a delivery mechanism for the City Council's 2030 Climate Strategy and Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy.
2. There are few development sites in our area and there was strong support for zoning them for **affordable housing, cohousing and dwellings for older people.** The community is against more short term lets, aparthotels or purpose-built student accommodation.
3. To make our area climate resilient means permission for **solar panels** on more roofs (even in conservation areas), preparation for **heat networks** and a **retrofit support hub**.
4. Our traditional, long established **local shops** and leisure facilities are appreciated except that parts of Merchiston are less well served - this should be addressed.
5. Green space is valued - along with access to it. More **community gardens** or allotments would be welcomed. Residents want more **trees**, further greening measures, parklets, rainwater reuse, green roofs and pollinator gardens.
6. There is ambition to see places that are empty used as **public community hubs**, where all groups and ages are to be accommodated and made welcome e.g. **public diners**.
7. People value the **walkability** of the area and access to **public transport**, but desire fewer cars, both for safety and a reduction in air and noise pollution. Improving **connections** between the network of cycle lanes is important to further enhance the area for cycling.
8. We want **safe, accessible indoor and outdoor spaces** for all to use as members of an inclusive community, as a reflection of the importance of both physical and mental health.
9. Two major development opportunities exist in the area of our Community Councils:
    - What happens to Edinburgh Napier University Merchiston site when they leave?
    - What happens to Astley Ainslie after the NHS moves from most of the site?

We urge that the principles emerging from the community consultation are followed in all planning decisions in our area.

Our place-based ideas:



Who we are and who was consulted

This Local Place Plan has been developed under the aegis of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 as a community-led document that allows local people to propose how land and buildings are developed in our area. The secretariat was Banzai Edinburgh with greenlight funding from Edinburgh Communities Climate Action Network.

We used guidance issued by the City of Edinburgh Council. We are grateful for the advice shared at our first People's Assembly by Councillor Joan Griffiths, convener of Planning, and help from Senior Planning Officer, Anna Grant.

This local community group has led the work of engaging with stakeholders including: Astley Ainslie Community Trust, Boroughmuir High School, Bruntsfield Primary School, Clean Heat Edinburgh Forum, Dig-in Community Grocer, Edinburgh Student Housing Cooperative, Eric Liddell Community, Fountainbridge Canalside Community Trust, Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links, Grove Community Garden, James Gillespie's Primary School and High School, Living Streets Edinburgh, Morningside Community Council, St Oswald's Centre, The Bike Station and Tollcross Community Council.

In the period from autumn 2025 - autumn 2026 the dedicated task group has:

- Distributed 10,000 flyers to households, with details of a survey and in-person events
- Shared a digital survey with over 200 responses
- Run three in-person People's Assemblies, with nearly 100 participants in all
- Presented at Edinburgh Student Housing Coop, inviting feedback and questions
- Presented at Bruntsfield Primary School (BPS) assembly with over 200 pupils
- Engaged in a classroom project for P3 classes to envision the local area in 2040
- Gathered initial responses and presented these at five local events on display boards
- Received around 300 further comments at the events attended by over 1,000 people
- Circulated this draft to all our local elected Councillors, MSPs and MPs for comment.

This document refers to 'we' and 'us' to represent the communities covered in our Local Place Plan. All issues were raised by local people, through surveys and in-person events. The task group analysed the data that emerged and the most well-supported and recurring ideas are shown here in this Local Place Plan. Each suggestion has undergone a period of consultation to confirm its place in the plan, with the support of the Community Councils.

Community Councils: working for our neighbourhood

Merchiston Districts Community Council (MDCC)
One of the first community councils of Edinburgh, we speak up for over 19,000 residents of Merchiston. We scrutinise planning and licensing proposals and discuss traffic and parking issues, tree cover and green space affecting the amenity of our area.

Ian Doig, Chair: merchistonchair@gmail.com

Marchmont & Sciennes Community Council (M/SCC)
Our patch has a population of around 11,000, and we now meet on the fourth Wednesday of the month to discuss issues relevant to the local area. We have up to 14 elected representatives and attendance from local groups like the Grange Association. We also recently opened the Sciennes Arts Hub.

Brian Gilmore, Chair: marchmontsciennes.commcouncil@gmail.com

A bit of background



This Local Place Plan is the result of collaboration between Merchiston Districts Community Council and Marchmont & Sciennes Community Council. It was initiated by local community-led neighbourhood group Banzai Edinburgh and grant-aided by Edinburgh Communities Climate Action Network (ECCAN).

Our focus is South Central Edinburgh – including Merchiston, Fountainbridge, Bruntsfield, Marchmont and Sciennes. These areas share a similar heritage of pre-1919 tenement and terraced housing, busy local high streets, and strong community identities.

Because the Astley Ainslie Community Trust has prepared a separate Local Place Plan for that site we have not included this area. We also value the work of Morningside Community Council and recognise their Local Place Plan just to the south.

We have collaborated with many local groups and organisations to produce an informed and participatory Local Place Plan. Key stakeholders include St Oswald's Centre, Bruntsfield Primary School, Dig In Community Greengrocer and Edinburgh Student Housing Coop, among many others.

What have we done?



We hand delivered 10,000 leaflets, published an online survey with over 200 responses and held three People's Assemblies in January, February and March. We then presented our findings for further insight at five events over the summer, with 300 further comments received. Total attendance at these events was over 1,000 people.

The level of community support has been encouraging over a ten-month period. Consistent themes and requests make us confident in our assertion that this Local Place Plan puts forward the vision of the local community.

As part of the outreach process, we made sure we were reaching a diverse group of people across the area we cover in this plan. To do this, we continually analysed the participant data and made an extra effort to speak to under represented groups.

We noticed we weren't getting many responses from younger people, so we went along to Bruntsfield Primary School assembly with over 200 pupils, plus a follow-on classroom

project to envision with P3 classes (P3A, P3B and P3C) to capture their views on the local area in the future.

We also met with residents at Edinburgh Student Housing Coop and we targeted advertising on social media encouraging neighbours to respond to our survey.

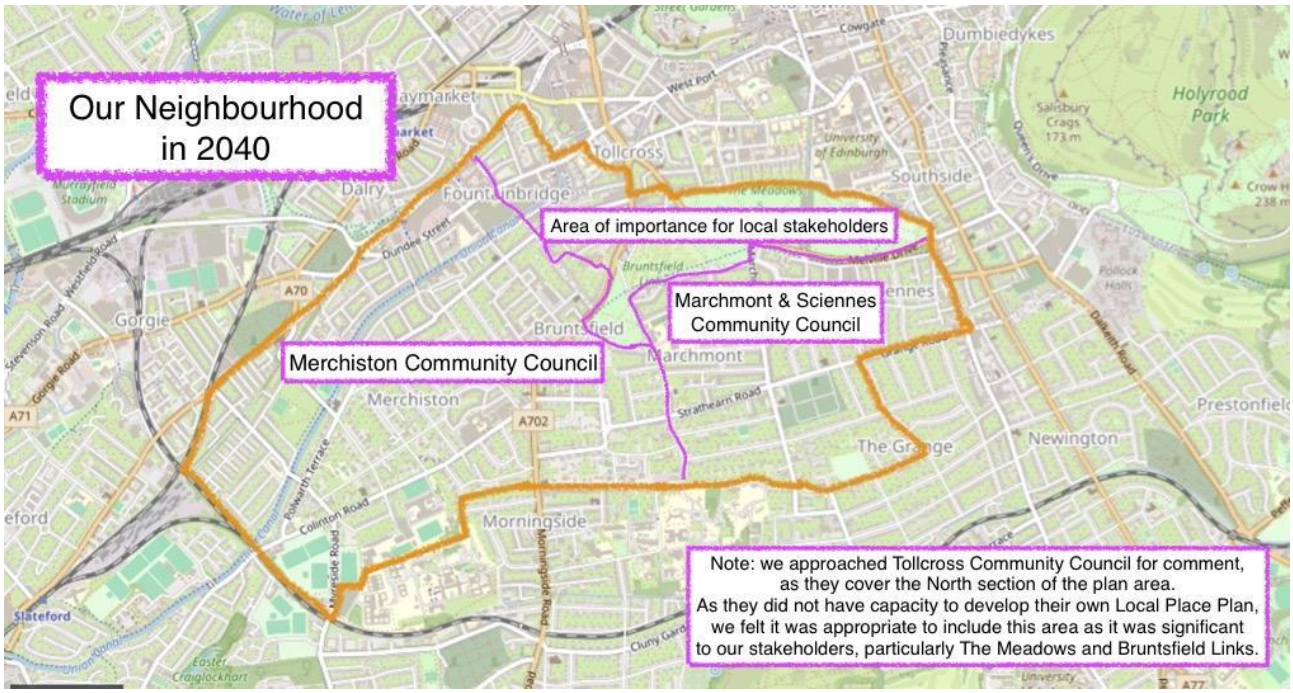
We contacted organisations run by and working with people of colour, who were less visible in the data. Some of this worked and some of it didn't – but we're pleased to say that the representation in the survey responses is particularly diverse in terms of age, location and length of time in the area. All in all, we engaged with slightly under the city average for disability, ethnic diversity and home ownership.





A group of participants at our People's Assembly.

Our Place



This is the area chosen for our Local Place Plan (marked in orange). It comprises the areas covered by our two Community Councils, plus a little to the North. Because residents consider the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links as part of our locality they have been included, while the Astley Ainslie site has been excluded because the Community Trust has prepared their own plan.

Context



We are a densely populated urban area, with large areas of Victorian and Edwardian tenement flats together with areas of larger villas, 'colony' houses and modern student housing, with a mix of families, professionals and students.

The area has always included industrial and mixed-use land. The breweries of Fountainbridge and Tollcross' canalside warehouses have now gone - replaced by new offices and flats.

Along and behind the high streets there are a range of mid-sized community buildings, often converted churches, and - in residential areas - a range of smaller venues, such as bowls and tennis clubs, social clubs, and heritage sites.

There are also a range of workshops, mews, and ground-floor office units scattered amongst otherwise residential properties, providing space for small light industrial units, and, increasingly, start-ups from the creative or tech industries.

The area has good nursery provision and encompasses several primary schools, state and private high schools and Edinburgh Napier University. Local amenities include many independent shops and businesses.

Green space and play and sports facilities are provided at the Meadows, Bruntsfield Links and Harrison Park.

There are good public transport connections to central Edinburgh, and some good, although patchy, cycling infrastructure. The Union Canal provides an important commuting and recreational route through the area.







10,000 copies of this A5 leaflet were hand delivered across the consultancy area in 2025.

What we heard from our consultations and feedback



In our research we drew on the **Place Standard Tool** that was developed through a partnership between Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS), the Scottish Government, and NHS Health Scotland (now Public Health Scotland).

We framed our survey questions around six themes drawn from the tool, plus one that many expressed concern about. Here are the results under each heading:

1. Climate Resilience

In our initial conversations with neighbours, there was a marked concern about the gap between policy and practice on issues to do with coming climate disruption.

This was the issue with the most negative comments, for example a lack of preparation for retrofitting our homes or concern about flooding risks. Locals felt there was insufficient guidance and financial support for home insulation measures or provision of zero-carbon alternatives to gas heating. Many have experienced difficulty in implementing low-carbon improvements like **solar panels, heat pumps or heat networks**.



The concern is that our neighbourhood is not sufficiently prepared for the changes to come, and that there is not enough alignment of the city council's primary objectives, climate adaptation and climate mitigation strategies to ensure compliance with town planning objectives.

Residents seek more **joined-up thinking** and application of policies that help achieve **greater long-term resilience**. Pupils from Primary 3 classes illustrated their imagined futures and these included **more wind and solar power.**

The community asks that **the City Plan 2040 should be radically re-framed** as a delivery mechanism for the City Council's 2030 Climate Strategy and Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy.

2. Housing & Heating

The housing in the area is varied, with many Victorian or pre-Victorian tenement buildings, plus later additions. For example, the tenement buildings in Marchmont were partly built before 1890, with others completed before 1914. The housing in Sciennes was mainly spec built for sale, with most housing completed by 1900.



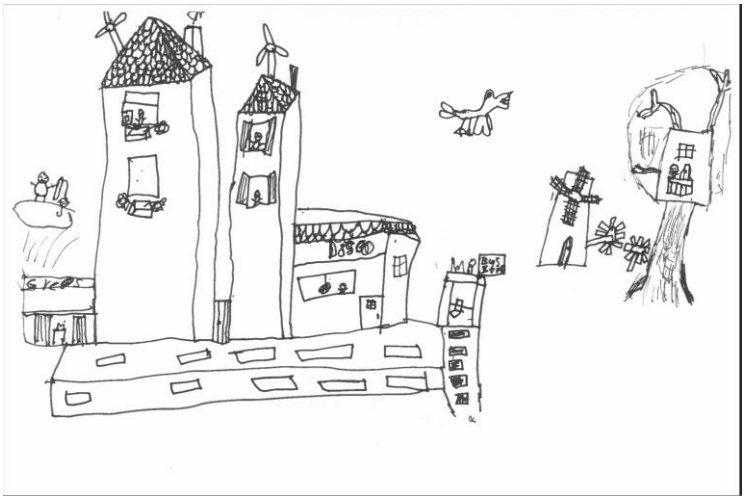
With the growth of Edinburgh University from the 1960s onwards, many tenement flats in Marchmont were bought to house students, either by parents or, increasingly, by private landlords. In recent years, with the rise of international students, large numbers of purpose-built student accommodation projects have been introduced across Edinburgh.

Our neighbourhood is characterised by the traditional sandstone tenements of the late 19th century - along with streets of terraced houses built in the same era. With double hung single glazed sash windows and high ceilings these have always been experienced as rather cold and draughty.

An additional challenge is that the traditional construction allows for “air-washing” in the attic spaces behind the lath and plaster and above the ceilings of top floor flats. This causes cold external air to percolate through living spaces, making them frequently very cold.

From wide consultation, we see the need to **make homes warm and dry, well ventilated and heated by non-fossil fuel sources**. We hope there will be closer integration between the City Plan 2040 and the updated Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy [LHEES] which envisages **heating by heat networks** or pipes in the street from energy centres capturing waste heat.

Locals expressed **concerns about the restrictions on solar panels** in e.g. conservation areas and we urge further relaxation of these restrictions and active encouragement for local facilities like the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative panels on public buildings.



We urge the establishment of a **Retrofit Advice Hub** for all traditional pre-1919 dwellings, like many in our area. The hub should provide useful advice to householders and tradespeople on good practice that reduces the risk of unintended consequences of inappropriate

measures. This certainly must include advice of ventilation strategies that recover energy while ensuring the “tighter” homes are sufficiently aired for human and built fabric safety.

There are only a few development sites in our area and there was a strong support for these being zoned for **affordable housing - perhaps cohousing - and dwellings for older people**. Respondents are against more short term lets, aparthotels or purpose built student accommodation.

In their black line drawings, P3 students from Bruntsfield Primary School envisioned **more people living on the canal** - for example in barges - and **green buildings -** plants growing on roofs and the tops of bus stops.

3. Green Space & Nature

We heard examples of the enjoyment neighbours gain from our large public parks at the Meadows, with community support from Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links (FoMBL) and Harrison Park with Fountainbridge Canalside Community Trust (FCCT).

We want more green space and green infrastructure - both **street trees** and **rainwater management facilities**. Space to sit and enjoy green spaces. The need for increased diversity in green space was recognised and children and parents at Bruntsfield Primary School proposed a **playground in the upper Links**.

Over 70 P3 students from Bruntsfield Primary School discussed the changes they would like to see in their local community and then drew black line pen pictures of how they envisioned these changes. They wanted to see **a pond, more trees, flowers and plants** and **more insects, birds, bees, rabbits, hedgehogs and maybe even some deer!**

Later in our consultation we had strong support for establishing **playgrounds or causeys** in our area. Below are some suggested locations, with the backing of Living Streets.



City Playgrounds&Causeys

FRASER / LIVINGSTONE ARCHITECTS

Community gardens were highly valued, like the one on the north side of the Meadows adjacent to the Tennis Courts, with the potential for more space for these on the upper Links. We would also like to see **community orchards** within our parks.

Noting the likelihood of more flash floods, we would like to see **rainwater butts for council premises,** along with encouragement for residents to improve water retention and reduce run-off.

Green roofs, walls and pollinator gardens were identified as green infrastructure options for the area - for example on all bus shelters. These improve local air quality and cool the city. Diversity in planted trees is important.

Transforming concrete or paved public places into greener areas with planters or other green infrastructure rated highly in our surveys, for example across from Bruntsfield Black Sheep coffee. Participants in our survey wished the city council would discourage paving over front gardens with resulting loss of green space and increased stormwater runoff.

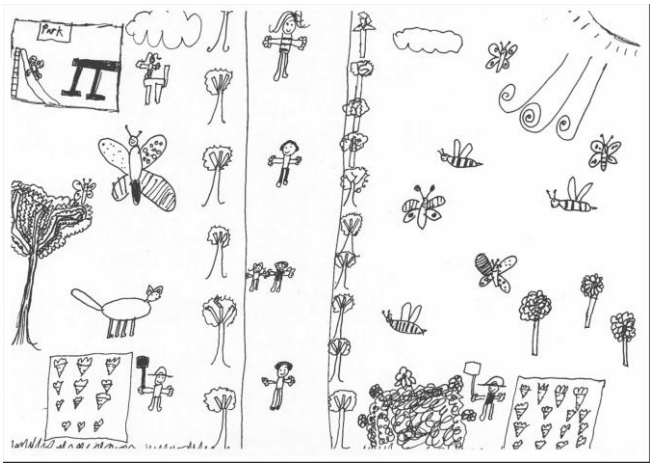
4. Local amenities & services



There was widespread recognition that the different neighbourhoods in our area are well served by both local shops and many public services like libraries. We heard that these are highly prized and urge policies that maintain the traditional village centres' continuing liveliness.

There was a call for retention of **publicly accessible spaces and places** that enabled people to meet in a quiet location for rest and recreation. Many of the buildings built as churches and associated halls provide this function and the fine example of the new life for St Oswald's Church - hosting the Pianodrome and community-owned hall - was mentioned as a positive move that should be encouraged.

Recognition of the importance of **public open spaces** - even quite small ones - would complement the bigger parkland areas like The Meadows and Harrison Park, which are a feature of the original landscaping from the 1900s.



In the over 70 black line drawings by pupils of Bruntsfield Primary School following the whole school assembly about the Local Place Plan, students illustrated that they wanted to see **more green spaces, more recycling and less litter.**

5. Community & social life



Our neighbourhood wants to achieve a **sense of community** and social life that is **accessible and inclusive**, fosters spaces for neighbours to come together, and **tackles climate change**.

We want **empty buildings to become community hubs**. Promoting and prioritising these spaces, without there being a paywall attached, will make the local area both supportive of its residents and welcoming to visitors.

We want our community spaces and activities to make every effort to mitigate climate collapse. **Solar panels** on community spaces should be a default. We should also enable residents to buy less, by hosting **tool libraries** and encouraging **community food-growing**. We would also like to focus on turning our green spaces into local hubs and places to reconnect with nature.

We celebrate the transfer of St Oswald's Church to a community-led charity - offering space to the Pianodrome.

We also **value our local social enterprises and our charity shops**, as these are spaces that are not run by large businesses and align well with our community values.



We value **inclusivity, accessibility and safety** as crucial to having a thriving social scene. This means **reducing traffic** so that streets can become safer for kids to play, organising **intergenerational community events**, and having **mixed-age community living**.

Further, we hope for more **community notice boards** in our local area, so that community activities and information can be accessible to people without having to use social media.

"**Third spaces**" that are either free or cheap to visit were a popular suggestion. This could include **public diners** and cafes, gazebos on our grassy areas, providing street seating, and also increasing the visibility of spaces we already have. These are just some ways we want to create warm, welcoming spaces for our residents and visitors.

We value a strong sense of local community and want to engage with local initiatives like having a **community firepit** and places for community stories to be told - so that we can enable residents to know and trust their neighbours.

We are aware of the amount of space that is taken up by short-terms lets or empty offices. We want to improve this, by using these spaces for community building, or encouraging

longer term lets to be taken-up. **We want the area to open-mindedly support the founding and growth of a new generation of social spaces and civic forums.**

6. Safety, health & wellbeing

The topic of safety, health and wellbeing means different things to different people. To begin, we had positive feedback that **women felt safe walking around the area at night**. When public spaces are regularly in use they feel safe.



Other safety issues are traffic related, largely road traffic - especially around schools - and anti-social use of ebikes. The trend towards road **traffic reduction** is extremely popular, with a call for **more visible community police** seen to be applying existing laws.

Both physical and mental health are recognised as of importance across the age range. We value access to **high quality outdoor space**, with the parks and canalside often mentioned. Seating indoors and out are seen to be essential for the mental health benefits of the whole community as well as those less able.



Cost and alcohol-free spaces for socialising throughout the day and into the evening should be increased for those across the full age range, and certainly not forgetting young people who have few resources available to them. A sense of community is a recurring theme to support safety as well as health, so spaces and events that include all ages and backgrounds are requested.

The community are both safety conscious and aware of the importance of the health of the people within the community being linked to the mental health of everyone. We want safe indoor and outdoor spaces for everyone to use as members of an inclusive community. The parks and canal side are highly valued outdoor spaces.

The community wants to build new, and enhance existing bonds across the community to further develop **trust, safety and understanding** amongst different groupings within the community.

7. Transport

We want **a neighbourhood accessible to all, easy to navigate on foot, wheelchair or by bike and which is well connected by public transport**, in line with Scotland's

Sustainable Travel Hierarchy. A key theme was the desire for **fewer cars**, especially SUVs; this was consistent across all three Assemblies and the surveys.

The Merchiston Districts Community Council (MDCC) members in particular note Edinburgh Council's strong policies on 'liveable neighbourhoods', on net zero, and on the transition towards more active travel, which they support.



Residents accept that, for some, driving offers the only means of accessing their homes and local services. However, they want a **reduction in the number of cars** on local roads to improve safety and air quality and to facilitate active travel and additional community spaces for e.g. playgrounds.

People would like to see infrastructure changes, including **car-free zones in high density areas,** together with **additional traffic calming measures** near schools, especially Craiglockart Primary School, Boroughmuir High School and the Polwarth roundabout. The community's desire to see planned reductions in vehicle traffic along residential streets is especially pronounced in the Polwarth / Shandon area, as evidenced by responses to consultations and also by residents' representations at public meetings of MDCC.

P3 students from BPS want to see **fewer cars, more spaces for bikes, scooters and more people walking and wheeling.**



There is concern about the volume of traffic, particularly HGVs, on the North-South routes running through the Merchiston area. The canal limits the number of available routes, so those that exist are heavily used.

Good cycling infrastructure and bike hire and loan schemes were highly valued. Encouraging cycling will help to reduce car numbers. This can be done by adding to and improving connections between the current network of cycle paths and cycle lanes and improving cycle path surfaces and road surfaces.

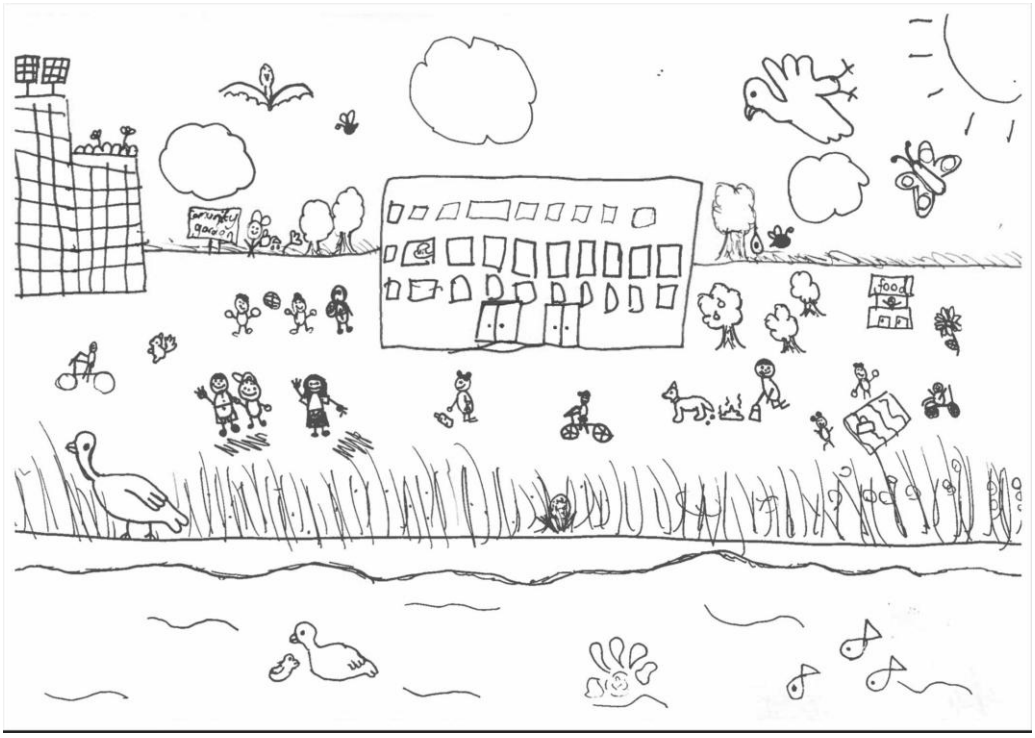
Narrow and cobbled sections of the canal towpath - a valued and increasingly busy commuter route - **should be reviewed** to improve safety for cyclists and walkers. One proposed solution from the community was adding **convex mirrors under bridges** to improve visibility. Improving provision for cargo bikes, including provision of **secure cycle hangars and parking** for larger bikes, will help encourage uptake and reduce car journeys.

The current walkability around our neighbourhood is highly valued. We want to see **safer walking routes to schools, parks, and community venues** by implementing features such as speed bumps, clear signage, and additional crossing signals.

Community-led assessments could continuously refine and improve these routes, based on the experiences of residents. **Dropped kerbs and wider and less cluttered pavements** will assist wheelchair users and pedestrians.

While public transport, especially buses, was highly rated, suggested improvements included increased capacity on some buses. More consistency in accessibility, frequency and reliability will encourage more residents to use them. **Better cross town bus routes** and connections e.g. from Tollcross to Newington, and serving the southern suburbs, were also highlighted.

Across all of this, a strategic plan for the whole area is required to press down on vehicle usage and support active travel. A case for this was made repeatedly during 2026 by MDCC, through Councillors and senior Edinburgh Council officers but has sadly produced no response. This Local Place Plan reaffirms the case for a strategic and coordinated approach to traffic management in the area.



Links to planning

The Place Standards topics of interest to our residents refer to extensive National and Local planning policies. The links highlighted in the table are indicative not exhaustive. Our plan is consistent with the following strategic objectives adopted by the City of Edinburgh Council which operates on an interconnected set of strategic plans with local partners to achieve a net-zero, fairer, and thriving capital by 2030.

- **City Plan 2030**: Guides sustainable urban development while protecting green belts and natural heritage.
- **2030 Climate Strategy**: Targets net-zero carbon through building energy efficiency, local heat networks, and public transport decarbonization.
- **Thriving Greenspaces & Open Space**: Enhances parks, urban nature reserves, and community food-growing areas.
- **City Mobility Plan 2030**: Seeks a 30% reduction in car kilometers through active travel and public transit.
- **City Centre Transformation**: Prioritizes pedestrians and cycling on major routes.
- **Our Future Streets**: Removes through traffic and expands north-south tram network.
- **Refreshed Economic Strategy**: Drives a greener, fairer post-pandemic economy via local business collaboration.
- **End Poverty Plan**: Focuses on fair work, poverty prevention, and affordable housing.

Discussion Topic	Relevant CEC / NPF Planning policy	Document and section
Climate resilience	**Environment and Design Policies** Sustainable Developments Conservation area development Protection of Biodiversity	**NPF4** Sustainable places Liveable places Productive places
Housing & heating	**Housing policies** Housing development Affordable Housing Mixed communities	**NPF4** Conserving & recycling assets Local Living
Local community and services	**Infrastructure and Transport policies** Access to community facilities Loss of community facilities Sustainable Energy and Heat networks	**NPF4** Just Transition Local Living Compact Urban Growth Rebalanced Development
Green spaces and nature	**Environment and Design Policies** Design Quality and Context Green Blue Infrastructure	**NPF4** Compact Urban Growth
Getting around and transport	**Infrastructure / Transport Policies** Provision of Transport Infrastructure Cycle and Car Parking	**NPF4** Just Transition Rebalanced Development
Safety, health & wellbeing	**Housing, Infrastructure, Transport, Environment and Design Policies** Housing development Access to community facilities	**NPF4** Just transition Local Living Compact Urban Growth