

Retail Policy Group Minutes

Meeting held at Essential Edinburgh
New Parliament House

In Attendance: Isabella Miller (Chair)
Graham Russell (West End Association and Leith Walk Traders)
Hannah Park (Princes Mall)
Graham Birse (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce)
Scott Munro (Marks & Spencer)
Michael Apter (Paper Tiger and West End Traders Assoc.)
Joshua Miller (Charlie Miller)
Martin Clarke (Edinburgh Woollen Mill)
Rochelle Weir (St James Shopping)
Michael Gallagher (Essential Edinburgh)

Guest Speaker: Pamela Scobbie (Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance)

Apologies: Gordon Drummond (Harvey Nichols)
Denzil Skinner

Isabella Miller (IM) welcomed all and introduced Scott Munro to the Group.

Matters arising:

IM then asked, as a matter arising, what actions had been taken by members of the Group by way of feedback or input to the proposed TRO's post tram.

Rochelle Weir (RW) reported back that she had met with traffic consult at Colin Buchanan, and on the basis of that advice, submitted objections from Hendersons Global Investors and John Lewis. She mentioned that the submission was made just in time and the comments reflects thoughts on all issues of the TRO's not just those pertaining to Picardy Place and the St James Centre.

Michael Apter (MA) submitted an objection on behalf of the West End Traders, specifying a particular objection to the direction of traffic on many streets. Tie now have a copy of these objections.

Graham Russell (GR) confirmed that the TRO's are produced by the Council but Tie has input.

Scott Munro (SM) asks the current timeline for completion

MA replies 2014 at present. He stated that the next step is to be present at the appeal. MA continued that he feels it important to have retailers present representing the whole of the city. It must be made relevant to all.

Graham Birse (GB) launched objections but is not sure what weight they carry.

Joshua Miller (JM) mentioned that the RPG was formed as a response to CETM and in a similar spirit must form a united front to carry weight on the TRO issue. JM asked whether the RPG and the TOG) could work together on this issue.

GB noted a conflict of interest for one member but felt there was room for the two groups to get together to discuss the TRO's.

MA would like to find out the date for the appeals so that they are well attended. MA asked if GB knew of any objections lodged from the Tourism Group?

GB replied that the Balmoral Hotel have lodged an objection.

MA mentioned that the TRO's may change with the change of contractor.

Michael Gallagher (MG) asked if the objections were going to be collated.

SM noted that it would be interesting to see if there was consistency in the objections

IM confirmed that the objections could be shared (St James/John Lewis and West End objections attached.)

IM requested that RW look into having her contact at Colin Buchanan speak at the next RPG meeting in August 2010.

GB raise another matter from previous minutes: the future of OFB. Funding will end at the end of March 2011. He reported that Tie are sympathetic but need to work more closely with EE and DEMA in order to create a cohesive marketing plan.

Edinburgh Planning Concordat:

GB outlined that this new document was born of frustration at the planning process. He noted that the city has a bad reputation externally for bureaucracy in this area. The Chamber is concerned about this reputation and while it acknowledges that the World Heritage status is a factor, points out that there are 120 cases currently assigned to each planning officer, compared with 80 per officer in Glasgow. ECC had been critical therefore sought to be proactive and made overtures to the council. The document (link attached) was the result of a six month contract for a consultant. The document represents a significant cultural change in the planning department. GB went through the content of the document and explained that planners and developers have to follow the protocol set out. It is not legally binding but with such high profile signatories it will be difficult not to respect the process. The concordat should lead to a quicker and cheaper process and improve the city's external reputation.

SM asked if the document will affect the process already in place with Primark.

GB replied that the pace is being determined by Primark themselves.

MG noted that the concordat will definitely help St Andrew's Square.

JM asked if the document is now live and if it has been promoted.

GB replied that a press release was issued and that the concordat feature son the ECC website. (A copy of the release is attached).

GR asked about the scope of the document relative to the size of developments.

GB replied that it is only for major developments

Rateable Value Appeal:

GB outlined the growing concern about the re-evaluation of rates, as the increases can be crippling for businesses in recession. The figures used were from April 2008 which are not a relevant basis for the financial picture now. GB noted that hotels in particular have been very badly hit, as the rates are based on turnover. There is an appeals process but it is very slow.

GB has met with John Swinney to discuss the issue and discovered that Mr Swinney was not aware how badly affected small businesses were. GB explained to Mr Swinney that the increase in the relief scheme did not keep pace with the increase in the rates. GB is meeting Mr Swinney again in the upcoming weeks.

MA advocated a collective appeal from small businesses.

GR commented that restaurants, hotels and small businesses had been worst hit.

MA mentioned that it would be worthwhile for EE to look into the changes in contributions from those in the BID as there is great inconsistency among different streets in the area.

John Swinney has agreed to test the assessor on these inconsistencies.

RW carried out a review on the figures affecting the tenants in the mall and saw no consistency.

MA made an appeal for justification of the increase in rateable value against a drop in revenue and footfall. His appeal was dodged.

An issue is that the assessor is not responsible to anyone. It is an independent body within the government. Ministers are only able to issue guidance. John Swinney has agreed to issue guidance on the degree to which circumstances differ now from April 2008.

JM asked about the difference the increases make to EE's income.

MG replied that there was no impact in this ballot.

Edinburgh Sparkles Campaign:

Pam Scobbie (PS) presented DEMA's proposal for Christmas 2010 and Jan/Feb 2011. (Presentation attached.)

PS stressed that the presentation was a planning document and was just a skeleton of the campaign. Presenting this early was a response to criticism last year of lack of time.

RW felt that retailer opening hours needed to be more prominent in the Sparkles campaign for 2010. She also said that she would push tenants to open later but that 10pm was unrealistic.

SM felt that there was a fantastic energy about the city at Christmas and Princes Street Gardens were wonderful. He noted however that the hoarding displayed at Queen Street Station Glasgow was in the wrong placed and wanted to know if the correct site would be purchased this year?

PS replied that this had been rectified for summer, that summer would make a stronger splash. Summer is also being advertised on trains so the campaign is getting more fluid. DEMA are building momentum with the campaign, getting slicker and aiming for there to be more opportunities for input.

MA thinks that the advertising focus should target the Borders and those areas which five years ago were in Edinburgh's catchment.

MA continued that the investment requested was not realistic for small retailers, and asked what was being done to help small businesses. He felt that the figures quoted would pose no problem to larger retailers but were not feasible for others.

IM pointed out that while John Lewis has a large national advertising budget, the budget at branch level would also find these figures unachievable.

PS is meeting OFB to discuss help for small retailers.

MA has doubts about how OFB fits in with this plan.

PS made it clear that the presentation was specifically about advertising and other options would still remain.

MA still did not feel that the campaign presented worked with the way that OFB are spending their money.

GR fears that DEMA and OFB may be merging and that does not meet the goals of OFB. He raised objections to DEMA taking over as their "success" was not the same as OFB's.

Hannah Park (HP) would like to see smaller packages so that everyone can get a chance to get involved.

JM felt that while there were positives in working together it could create blandness and advised against going too far down that road this year. He thinks the city should look to do what isn't obvious. He felt that the presentation outlined a strategy that was too macro.

PS assured all that what happened last year would be preserved. She invited suggestions on how a model could be achieved.

IM presented a summary to PS:

- Ensure that the diversity of the city's shopping offer is represented
- Need to target the local customer more than the city breakers
- Important to remember that it is all "our money" anyway when seeking match funding

PS requested that her email address be included to allow members to provide on going feedback. (Included in covering mail)

West End and GATA BID Update:

MA updated the group that a steering group had been set up for the West End and Grassmarket. The groups is meeting the council on 17 June to discuss taking the proposal forward.

AOB:

MA stated that the tram project was about to go very wrong and the plug was about to be pulled. It is therefore vitally important that the RPG be involved in consultation from the very beginning once tram works dispute is resolved, e.g. to feed into the timetable, ensure better funding for OFB.

GR felt there will not be much progress for two years. The plug will be pulled on the consortium. He feels the tram route will be an important factor in the 2012 local elections. He thinks it was a

mistake to “start everywhere” and work should “add on” and be undertaken with more control. GR doesn’t feel that TOG undertakes this job.

JM noted that TOG has a role, reporting what is happening currently but doesn’t set strategy.

IM stated that RPG should set out the strategy for TOG and they can have a collective voice.

JM would like to see more info on parking strategy and understand the long term vision.

IM proposed Marshall Poulton as a speaker for 2011.

National Skills Academy

MG flagged up the National Skills Academy for Retail and asked for the link to be included in these minutes for information.

Date of next meeting: 25 August 2010, 3pm, Level 5, John Lewis