

Retail Policy Group Minutes

Meeting held at John Lewis, 23 April 2009 at 3pm

- In Attendance: Isabella Miller (Chair)
Michael Apter (Paper Tiger)
Kirsty Atkinson (Burt Greener Communications)
Graeme Birse (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce)
Tom Campbell (Essential Edinburgh)
Gordon Drummond (Harvey Nichols)
Ian Elder (House of Fraser)
Clara Suess (Burt Greener Communications)
Rochelle Weir (St James Shopping)
Robert Winter (Princes Mall)
- Guest Speaker: Dave Anderson, Director of City Development, City of Edinburgh Council
- Apologies: Martin Clark (Romanes & Patterson)
Joshua Miller (Charlie Miller Hairdressing)
Vinnie O'Brien (Standard Life Investments)
Paula Sharp (M&S)
Denzil Skinner (Hamilton & Inches)

Isabella Miller (IM) welcomed the guest speaker Dave Anderson to the meeting.

Following Mr Anderson's presentation, he invited questions from the group.

- Michael Apter (MA) asked if there was any information available on the appearance of the streetscape which will surround the tram lines.

Mr Anderson replied that within the last three weeks he had invited designs for "what a world-class Princes Street would look like". He will welcome a variety of options and carry out a cost / benefit analysis on each. He will also seek input from all stakeholders, including retailers. He stressed the importance he places on a high quality public realm and the need for a consensus.

- Tom Campbell (TC) asked if the pedestrianisation of Princes Street is a realistic possibility.

Mr Anderson replied that the tramworks afforded opportunities to look outside the status quo. All options will be considered and put out to consultation.

- Gordon Drummond (GD) enquired as to whether Alexandria was still on track

Mr Anderson admitted that it is still on track but has been impacted by the economic situation. Subsequently the project has been "reigned in a little". The commitment remains but progress will be slower. Work, in the form of a joint venture with the NHS, is scheduled to begin in four years' time. The joint venture will spread the risk.

- GD asked if funding which was agreed pre-September 2008 had been ringfenced.

Mr Anderson replied that some development had been culled and others, such as the Commonwealth Pool and the Usher Hall, would take precedence.

- IM raised the issue of taxi drivers giving false information to their customers regarding the routes for the trams, specifically insisting that the trams will not go to Edinburgh airport.
- All members discussed and acknowledged the issue of the negativity of The Scotsman and The Edinburgh Evening News.

Mr Anderson noted that the actual laying of the tram tracks had proven a tipping point for public opinion in other cities which had reintroduced trams, e.g. Dublin.

TOG Update

GD outlined the following:

- Progress is being made on the tramworks but the project is “not ahead of schedule yet”.
 - Haymarket poses no problems to catch up
 - Utilities work will be finished on Leith Walk in June. Work will recommence August / September
 - Picardy Place will be finished June / early July
- The new CEO (Richard Jeffrey) has been announced.
- The tram mock-up has been amazingly popular, attracting 74 000 visitors when on Princes Street, visitor response has been very positive, as of Monday 27 April the tram will be moved to the foot of Leith Walk.
- The council papers regarding the proposed summer embargo will be released shortly.

A subsequent email from GD informed the group that the August embargo was on the agenda for the meeting with the Council on Tuesday 28 April and that the final decision would be made at a policy and strategy meeting on Monday 11 May.

Essential Edinburgh / Burt Greener Update

TC reported that:

- Clean teams were now in place throughout the BID area.
- These teams were targeting the graffiti on Rose St, splitting the cost with the Council.
- The uniformed teams have been very well-received and have proved a strong liaison tool with the police.
- The EH Living magazine has been launched and there are dispensing units throughout the BID area. The magazine will be dispensed at Murrayfield stadium at all of the rugby fixtures in the month of May
- The Childsafe wristbands are continuing to be rolled out.
- Four taxi ranks now have taxi marshals in the evenings.
- Essential Edinburgh advertising will be put in place on the vacant shopping units in the BID area.
- The Eating Place market will take place fortnightly in Castle Street.

- The Spa in the City event will take place in St Andrew's Square on Sunday 24 May.
- The Science Festival was very successful. (TC pointed out that any events taking place in St Andrew's Square must be designed to maintain the tranquillity of the space.)
- Essential Edinburgh is looking into the feasibility of colour-washing the buildings on George Street year-round.
- The Arts in Business exhibition will publicly display art normally housed in private offices.
- The West End traders and those in the Grassmarket are both enthusiastic about the potential for further BID areas.

Clara Sues (CS) updated the group with the following:

- The Edinburgh shopper website is up and running. The uptake has been good but there is a need for greater participation from traders in Leith. Tram advisors have approached Leith businesses to encourage participation but so far with little success.
- The next EH Living magazine will be out at the end of September. All retailers are welcome to submit ideas.
- Burt Greener are looking for another idea to replace Month of Sundays in September. They are considering a fashion or a food event.

Ian Elder (IE) pointed out that the west end of Princes Street risks being neglected owing to the lack of space due to the tramworks.

MA informed the group of plans to erect a marquee for three or four days at the end of September in Stafford Street. This would host fashion events.

Winter Festivals Update

Robert Winter (RW) told the group that there had been no meeting on this topic yet this year, one factor being reorganisation within the Council.

He reported that:

- Last year's festivals had been one of the best for the participants. The good weather may have had an impact.
- Seven out of ten visitors to the city came to winter festival events.
- The review of the Street Party was on going.
- The Torchlight Parade was particularly well received last year.
- Christmas events are gaining in popularity with the Hogmanay night itself not proving so popular.

RW will keep the RPG updated on key dates in the Winter Festival events timeline.

Future of the RPG

MA raised the issue of the future of the RPG citing the low attendance at the meeting. He wondered if the RPG has been superseded by OFB and TOG and questioned if it had not in fact been made redundant.

RW disagreed, feeling that there is value in the various retail groups coming together under one 'umbrella' group.

IM agreed that there is still a role for the RPG. She advocates the ability of a smaller group to work more efficiently and does not see the numbers attending as an issue. She sees the future of the RPG as a tool for "pulling everything together".

RW sees the need for improved agenda setting. Members of the RPG sit on different groups, e.g. GD sits on TOG, but the RPG is at the top. RW felt that if an issue similar to the congestion charge were to arise again, the group is well placed to co-ordinate a retail view and appropriate actions.

IE felt that the RPG was good for the flow of information but is uncertain whether the group actually makes decisions.

MA felt that it was important for the RPG to have a view on every issue.

IM suggested an emphasis be put on the group's output. She stated that the RPG is a conduit for information. Each member has the personal choice as to which meetings they attend. She acknowledged that going forward the group should strive to be more productive.

MA reported that NCP are planning to attend OFB. He noted that NCP has never engaged in advertising or promotion before but they look set to become involved. The idea of a shoppers' bus was once again mooted.