



Minutes of the 150th Annual General Meeting of the Cockburn Association.

Held on 20th May 2025 at The Greyfriars Charteris Centre, The Pleasance, Edinburgh

1. Stephen Jardine, President of the Cockburn Association, welcomed all to the Annual General Meeting. Mr Jardine noted that so much has changed since the first meeting in George Street on the 15th of June. He was delighted to have offered the role as President and thanks Sir Sandy Crombie for his many years of hard work.

Mr Jardine recalled his first experience of the Cockburn Association as a student at Edinburgh University in the 1980's. One day I was stopped to sign a petition against plans by Scottish Gas to build an ugly pressure reducing station in East Queen Street Gardens. The result of that campaign was a neo-Greek temple in the gardens, seemingly well placed and timeless. He indicated that the role of President offered the opportunity to pay back what this city has given to him.

He said that we all want to see Edinburgh thrive and prosperbut not at any price. For 150 years the Cockburn has been fighting the forces that seek to exploit and degrade the fabric of our wonderful city. That battle is as fierce now as it was in 1875. From overtourism to ugly development via a streetscape featuring a year-round Festival of Signage, the Association still had much to do. He stressed that the Association should always criticise and object, but it must also support where we can and deliver a positive vision for the city.

Mr Jardine pledged to play a full part in the celebrations marking the 150th anniversary year but also want to support efforts to widen the membership, put the Cockburn Association on a sounder financial footing and to provide more opportunities to shape the conversation about, not just Edinburgh's past but also Edinburgh's future and what that should look like.

Finally, Mr Jardine paid tribute to Barbara Cummings who succeeded Professor Cliff Hague as the Chair of the Cockburn Council in 2022. Barbara was the first woman Chair of the Association in its long history and tragically passed away after a short illness. He expressed his thanks to her fellow Council member Richard Price for stepping into the role as Interim Chair and welcomed Dr Lesley Martin who will step in the role at the end of the AGM.

2. Adoption on Minutes of the 149th Annual General Meeting. The President asked for a mover and seconder; Peter Williamson moved adoption and Dr Moyes seconded. It was put the meeting, who endorsed the motion and approved the minutes.
3. Report from the Interim Chair of Council, Richard Price
Mr Price firstly echoed the President's comments about Barbara Cummins. He reported that the full summary of activities over the year was in the Annual Review which had been circulated to all members. Key activities included a strategic review which re-emphasised the continued need for the Association to play an active and independent part of civic affairs.

He reported that it had been a busy year in terms of development, with many applications for student housing. Future Streets was the City Council's proposals for city centre streets which was

supported in principle but not in detail due to serious issues of traffic displacement. An initial assessment of the north-south tram line was made noting concerns with issues such as the ability of the Georgian structure of South Bridge being able to take such a load. Comments were submitted on the World Heritage Site Management.

The Association spent considerable effort managing the Edinburgh Civic Forum and has concentrated on increased engagement with members through e-newsletters and social media channels.

He reported that it had be year of change for the Association with a new President, new Chair of Council and new Trustees. There was much to be proud of, but also much left to do.

4. Report the Treasurer, Dr William Moyes

Dr Moyes reported that all information of the Association's finances could be found in the Annual Report and Accounts as well as in the circulated Annual Review which contained the balance sheet and Statement of Financial Activities (SoFA).

Previously, he indicated that it was clear that we could not continue to fund day-to-day running costs by drawing down our reserves. We had to develop streams of income that would support our running costs on a reliable basis. To this end, Council determined that it needed to increase its staff resources if we were to respond effectively to the increasing demands on us. Therefore, an Engagement & Development officer was recruited over the year to help increase capacity.

Dr Moyes indicated that there is a financial cost to adding to our resources. In 2023-24, income was down by about £17,000 compared with 2022-23, and expenditure increased by about £11,000. Whilst not huge numbers, the Council had no hesitation in agreeing that the Association's accounts for 2023-24 should be on a going concern basis, and that judgement was fully supported by Chiene and Tait, who are our independent examiners.

Dr Moyes concluded that the Association is now operationally strong, but financially a bit tight. Our priority for the current year is to start to strengthen our financial position. This is the major challenge we face.

5. Reappointment of CT LLP as independent examiners

Dr Moyes proposed the reappointment of the independent examiners. This approved by general acclamation.

6. Report of the Policy & Development Committee, James Garry, Assistant Director

James Garry gave an illustrated PowerPoint presentation to the meeting. He reported on the continued rise of student housing and visitor-led developments across the city, notably Purpose-Built Student Accommodation and hotel developments. Whilst some of these were not contentious; there was a concern about oversupply and the impact on local neighbourhoods.

The Committee support positive conversion of historic structures but has objected to several applications which proposed the demolition of interesting historic structures, including one in the First New Town. Quality, context and overdevelopment were general themes. The committee had objected on several occasions to overly bulky, poorly designed proposals including a major site on Princes Street for a hotel development.

Mr Garry indicated that increasing the Association was concerned about the loss of housing to commercial uses like short-term lets. Some developments such as the conversion of the former Caledonian Brewery site were welcome with its skilled reuse of historic structures and sensitive new architecture inserted creatively into a constrained site. However, such schemes were the exception rather than the rule.

On the themes of civic amenity and culture, the Committee was concerned with commercial overreach, advocating for the protection of city centre amenity from festival/event creep.

Finally, on the theme of climate and climate vulnerability, he reported the committee's concerns with the unnecessary demolition of structures which were clearly convertible, with all the loss of carbon and energy that entailed.

The President thanked Mr. Garry for his presentation, highlighting his concern that the city was a tipping point.

7. Elections to Council – The President firstly noted two resignations from Council, Claire Mitchell KC, who as the Vice-Chair of Council, and Emily Yates. He thanked them both for their excellent contributions to the Council and its work. He then reported that Richard Rodger was to stand down following two full terms on Council, but that Council had determined work on the 150th anniversary book and activities was ongoing. The decision was therefore made to appoint him for a further term per the provisions of the constitution.

Mr Jardine reported there was several proposals for Council members and that these could be found on the candidate paper circulated previously. One candidate was standing for re-election – Peter Williamson. Two candidates are co-opted members standing for election – Eric Dawson and Harry Nimmo. Two further candidates were standing for election as new trustees – Fred Macintosh KC and Alastair Cook.

Mr Jardine suggested that all candidates were excellent additions to Council and proposed that they be elected by general acclamation. The AGM agreed, and all were elected to Council.

8. Corporate archive project - A short presentation on making the Cockburn Association's corporate archives available to all was given by volunteer Doreen Parker.
9. New Chair of Council, Dr Lesley Martin – The President introduced Dr Martin to the members. She gave a short outline of the tasks ahead, recognising the need for active citizenship; the need for facilitated conversations about the city and its direction; and about the importance of the Association in helping shape the future framework of the city.

Dr Martin indicated that the intersection of architecture, landscape, leadership and intellect would be a constant theme. A strong civic voice is key.

The 150th anniversary would be a priority with a formal book launch in June and a Civic Reception in December.

Dr Martin ended by expressing her gratitude to members and colleagues on Council and looked forward to working with everyone.

Stephen Jardine opened up the meeting asking for points or questions from the floor

Point raised included: Concern for the decline of Princes Street, the impact of tourism and the need for increased management and control; too many PBSA applications and not enough social housing; concerns about possible insensitive development of the Astley Ainslie hospital site.

On organisation issues, points raised included: need for Cockburn to be in the mainstream press more; need for more publicity and public agitation; concern that organisations like Edinburgh World Heritage were not effective; poor or ineffective political leadership from City Council.

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