



Councillor Neil Gardiner  
Convenor, Planning and Development Management Sub-Committee  
City of Edinburgh Council  
City Chambers  
High Street  
Edinburgh EH1 1YJ

24 March 2020

Dear Councillor Gardiner

### **Planning process and decisions during Covid-19**

I write to you in these extraordinary times and with a great deal of empathy for the City of Edinburgh Council as it seeks to manage a complex public and civic agenda during a time of unprecedented crisis. It remains unclear as to how the statutory planning system and the Council's management of it will be done over the next few weeks and months.

As individuals and organisations experience restrictions including isolation and social distancing, I feel it is essential that the ability to engage in both planning policy (e.g. City Plan 2030 and City Mobility Plan 2030) and planning applications is facilitated to ensure effective public engagement. Firstly, and recognising that the Scottish Government has extended the consultation period on the NPF, we would strongly advocate that flexibility is built into the current consultation phase for the local development plan with comments accepted well past the 31 March deadline. There is a wider question of how far the dramatic events of the last week or so may have overtaken some of the assumptions in the Main Issues Report. This is a further reason for taking a bit more time over it.

Secondly, and perhaps of greater concern, is the development management functions of the planning service. The Cockburn asks for clarity on the handling of planning applications, especially major application and ones likely to be controversial such as the Christmas Market by Underbelly and The Quaich Project by the Ross Development Trust. The latter development will have generational impacts, and the consultation will need to take account of the barriers to what would be the usual level of public involvement.

We believe that short-cut executive processes aimed, properly, at keeping crucial services operating should not be used for important planning decisions. The suspension of Council's Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee to the end of April should also mean the suspension of decision-taking on applications, with perhaps the exception of minor householder applications. Determining a planning application is not a critical public health or strategic economic decision. Whilst ensure a degree of continuity in the planning service is important, we ask you to ensure that civic and public regard is placed above any short-term administrative processes that might result from the current public health crisis.

Yours sincerely

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