



# Edinburgh Old Town Association

## Convener's Report 2018

In the Old Town in 2018 a major issue has been the growth in traffic throughout the area and the proposed solutions to deal with the problems this has caused. Congestion in the city centre is caused not only by the selfish and inconsiderate parking of cars but also by the number of city tour buses, the huge tour buses delivering passengers to local hotels, the size of delivery vehicles, the unrestricted goods vehicles that manoeuvre our busy streets damaging roads, kerbs and air quality and the number of private refuse lorries that duplicate collection runs. Being a pedestrian or a cyclist in Edinburgh can be a daunting experience! The City of Edinburgh has come up with some plans intended to improve the traffic situation. In a document entitled: Edinburgh – Connecting Our City, Transforming Our Places the Council outlined 15 proposals that if implemented would hopefully help to achieve ‘an exceptional city centre that is for all, a place for people to live, work, visit and play. A place that is for the future, enriched by the legacy of the past’. Workshops – one of which I attended as a representative of the Old Town Association – were organised by the Council in October 2018 to discuss the proposals. Many of them are laudable: improving our streets, gardens, spaces and places, making it easier to use public transport, creating a more active city, improving air quality and creating better accessibility. Some are contentious: the introduction of a workplace parking levy and the extension of the tram line. The most controversial idea proposed by the Council is a programme of Open Streets which would involve the introduction of vehicle-free days on the first Sunday of the month in the city centre. There is a vital question to be asked and answered. Does vehicle-free mean no traffic at all or will public transport and taxis be available for those with mobility issues? The topography of the Old Town with its inclines will make it inaccessible to some pedestrians. It is important that a far-reaching proposal such as this should be inclusive.

The increase in the number of visitors to Edinburgh still needs to be addressed. The city and particularly the Old Town seems to be constantly busy and crowded with tourists not only in August for the Festival and at Hogmanay but throughout the year with the consequent impact on the lives of local people. The author Alexander McCall-Smith has been quoted as saying tongue in cheek that the ‘City of Edinburgh’ should be re-named simply ‘Edinburgh Festival’ because of the apparently year-long events that take place in the city. It is possible that the imposition of a £2 nightly tourist tax to be imposed on visitors might be effective and may raise some money for the city coffers to improve amenities and infrastructure. Time will tell.

The difficulties of Airbnb and its ramifications have not disappeared. Members of the OTA Committee have been active in expressing concerns about the problem. Rosemary Mann spoke from the residents’ perspective at a mini-conference called ‘The Airbnb phenomenon’ organised by the Cockburn Association and Katie Kerr was interviewed by the BBC and attended an Airbnb/Visitor Accommodation Seminar. It is hoped that since there is cross-party agreement within the City Council and at the Scottish Parliament that something will be done to improve the situation as has happened in Paris and Barcelona.

The Old Town Association has addressed a wide range of members’ concerns about buskers, graffiti on St Giles Cathedral, advertising sheds, silent discos, the possibility of a statue to commemorate Elsie Inglis, the future of Campbell’s Close garden, the hoardings at Frankie and Benny’s in the High Street, the former church building at the corner of St John Street and Holyrood Road, the history of the derelict lamp at the South Bridge end of Chambers Street and the banning of A-boards. It is a diverse list! We have involved our local Councillors on many of these issues and we are grateful for their continued help and support.

As before the OTA has maintained links with other agencies including the City of Edinburgh Council, the Old Town Community Council, the Cockburn Association, Edinburgh World Heritage, the Central Library, the National Library, the Civic Forum, the Museum of Childhood, the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust and the Cowgate Under-5s Nursery. Members of the OTA attended the opening by Edinburgh World Heritage of the Tron Church. The Committee met with Olly Davies of Edinburgh Fringe Society in September to discuss concerns about the Fringe and it was agreed that future meetings would be advantageous. Money was donated to the Central Library to pay for the restoration of a coloured print of a panorama of Edinburgh of the 1830s. The print is now on display in the Central Library and it is well worth a visit.

The Old Town Association could not function as it does without the commitment and dedication of the Committee members many of whom have served for a number of years and I would like to thank them all on behalf of the membership of the Association. There are currently ten members on the Committee. Bill Cowan, Planning Secretary, is responsible for dealing with the numerous and varied planning applications submitted to the council relating to the Old Town area. Eric Drake and Rosemary Mann produce the thrice-yearly informative newsletters which are a mixture of hard-hitting editorials and fun articles with pages of photographs – excellent in colour – on for example ‘advertising sheds’. The newsletters also publicise activities by other local organisations like the City Art Centre and the Old Edinburgh Club. Outings and talks are organised by Naomi Richardson, Events Secretary, and this year’s programme of events was as interesting and wide-ranging as before. Activities included talks by Sheila Szatkowski on her 35 years as a tour guide, by Rosie Ellison of Edinburgh Film, by Eric Melvin on the Edinburgh of John Kay, by Russell Clegg on Anna Morton, a talk by the developers of the aerial gap site in the High Street, and by Bryden Ritchie of Edinburgh and Midlothian Beekeepers and Apiary Association on bee-keeping. There were visits to the Vine Trust Boat at Leith, the Art, Design and Fashion galleries at the museum and Art tours at the Scottish Parliament. The year ended with a Christmas party at Augustine Bristo Church where we enjoyed an evening of story-telling by Laura Harrington and Eric Drake. Other members of the Committee are Jean Fairbairn as Minutes Secretary, Rosemary Mann as Treasurer, Katie Kerr, Laura Harrington as Membership Secretary and Anja Amsel our Honorary President. We are fortunate that a new Committee member – Kate Marshall – joined in May. We are very pleased to welcome her.

Financially, the OTA remains on a sound basis:

<b>Summary Accounts for year to 31.08.18</b>		Receipts	Payments	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Events		1,139	1,303	(164)
Donations		193	500	(307)
All other receipts and payments		885	691	194
<b>Total</b>		<b>£2,217</b>	<b>£2,494</b>	<b>(£277)</b>
Balances	31.08.17	Receipts	Payments	31.08.18
	£6,853	£2,217	£2,494	£6,576

At 31 August 2018, the Association had 205 individual and 9 corporate members, a small rise in numbers on the previous year. It is hoped that having booking for events on-line will continue to bring in new members. We always welcome new members and thanks to Eric Drake we have produced an up-to-date leaflet which we hope will help in this. Membership is open to people who live in, work in or have an interest in or care for the Old Town. I would like to thank all our members for continuing to support the work of the Association. Our website [www.eota.org.uk](http://www.eota.org.uk) is where further information, links to other websites, newsletters and activities can be found.

In the future there will be further initiatives on traffic by the City of Edinburgh Council including follow-up workshops on Connecting Our City, Transforming Our Places. It is to be hoped that the ban on A-boards will be enforced. We welcome the re-opening of Panmure House and look forward to the unveiling of the Abbey Strand buildings. In particular we anticipate the opening of the renovated premises in Cranston Street as a community resource for the Old Town.

Barbara Logue  
Convener