

Alan Gordon Melville

Independent

INDEPENDENT (No political party affiliation)

Please tell us about yourself in a few sentences.

I've lived in the Shaw's colonies off Spey Terrace for ten years. I hold masters' degrees in Maths (MSc, York), and Computing (MPhil, Napier) and a PGCE in Secondary ICT from Chichester.

Politically I'm basically a free market libertarian; as a general rule of thumb I consider government action or legislation more likely to be a problem than it will ever be a solution. As the man said, the scariest sentence in the English language is "I'm from the government and I'm here to help."

Naturally I voted for Brexit, which I suspect makes me the only candidate who did so in this ward. (I'm prepared to be proved wrong, but suspect it unlikely).

Can you tell us about 2 or 3 of the most pressing issues in the ward, and how you are proposing to take on those challenges?

There are a few problems in the ward, but the most significant for me – congestion and its adverse effects (on parking, pollution, commerce and residents' quality of life) is going to remain a significant issue for many years.

The clear desire of sitting councillors and many candidates to push through an extension of the tram project is I believe utterly inimical to residents' interests. It will – AGAIN – divert traffic from Leith Walk itself to other routes, notably Easter Road, for at least a couple of years, damaging businesses across the ward, and making normal life a long list of frustrations or thousands of local people.

And what benefits will it bring? So far as I can see, any benefits will be minor, and themselves negated by the ongoing squeeze of already heavy traffic to narrowed routes. A glance at York Place any morning gives clear evidence of how this will affect us.

All that comes before we even consider whether the mooted extension will be completed on time and to budget. Edinburgh Council has never to my recollection managed any capital project to time and budget; the idea that 'lessons will be learned' this time is pie in the sky nonsense.

So I shall vote against any extension of the trams project.

Frankly, I'd rather the Council fixed the roads properly instead.

A second significant issue, certainly one that I notice, is refuse collection. Not so long ago, bins were collected weekly. After the EU's landfill directive was put into effect in this country, that became fortnightly, with all the concomitant problems of detritus and vermin one would expect from overflowing bins. I don't blame the seagulls, but it's something that can and should be tackled. We are leaving the EU; why not collect refuse weekly again? I would certainly push for this change if elected.

Finally, there are two related issues that affect both the ward itself and the wider city: education, and the desire of Holyrood to push through their infamous Named Person Scheme.

The condition of Edinburgh's state schools is a disgrace. New buildings are, as Oxfgangs Primary demonstrated just last year, of debateable safety and old ones have suffered years, even decades, of neglect. Fixing the School Estate will we are informed cost the council around £100 million, but this money must be spent, and then a clear and effective programme of maintenance must be set in train to prevent deterioration in future. Our schools should never again have 'Beware Falling Masonry' signs on them, as St Mary's RC Primary, for example, did for far too long. Good quality buildings make better learning environments, and better teaching ones too.

Which brings us to Named Person. Although it was struck down by the Supreme Court, parties at Holyrood (SNP, Greens, Libdems, some Labour MSPs) remain ideologically wedded to the idea that parents cannot bring up their own children without the government looking over their shoulders, and seem determined to implement some sort variant Scheme. Quite apart from the ongoing insult to parents across the country, any Scheme similar to the original will levy an immense burden on teachers and health visitors, who already have demanding jobs. Where will they find the time and energy to manage these extra duties? How damaging will it be to the relationship between families and teachers/HVs?

So, and regardless of any legislation passed at Holyrood, I shall oppose any and all implementation of a Named Person Scheme, and if it does get implemented, I will do everything in my power to assist any resident who falls foul of it.

I will examine closely the maintenance regime for schools in particular, and also for other public buildings. We do not want to find the city suddenly struck with a bill for millions because thousands were not spent on preventing issues. (The recent revelation of a bill of £5 billion to do work on the Houses of Parliament in London is a classic example of why maintenance should always be kept up to date rather than put off.) Still less dare we risk our children's lives in order to shave a fraction of a percent off a budget.

This text was supplied to Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) by the candidate, unedited.

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