

SUSTAINING EDINBURGH: THE LORD PROVOST COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CITY OF EDINBURGH

Daniel Mittler

At first sight, Scotland's Capital is in better shape than ever. The economy is booming, property prices are rising and tourists now even flock to Europe's north in the unwelcoming month of December - eager to enjoy Edinburgh's Hogmanay. In July the Scottish Parliament (at long last) reconvened. As a result, Edinburgh will gain another 5000 mostly well paid jobs as well as a good deal of international attention. And yet, Edinburgh also faces challenges and problems. Edinburgh's air pollution levels are serious and getting worse, killing at least 100 of her inhabitants prematurely each year (Friends of the Earth Scotland 1996a). Over 20,000 properties in Edinburgh are damp; 8,155 publicly owned houses are by the Council's own admission below acceptable standards. The number of long term unemployed is rising, with unemployment levels in deprived areas on the fringe of the city as high as 16% (Lord Provost Commission 1998).

In order to address these challenges and to search for ways to put Edinburgh on a socially inclusive and environmentally benign path of economic development, the City of Edinburgh Council in early 1997 established a new type of private-public partnership body. This institution was christened, rather awkwardly perhaps, **The Lord Provost Commission on Sustainable Development for the City of Edinburgh**. The Commission was modelled on national Royal Commissions - such as the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution - but Edinburgh is the first city in the UK to adapt this type of institution to the local level. The Commission was made up of a variety of experts from business (e.g. Hewlett Packard), academia, local and national government as well as community and non governmental organisations (e.g. Wester Hailes Representative Council and Friends of the Earth Scotland; see Appendix 1). The Commission was chaired by the head of Transco Bg plc, Gerry McLaughlan, and was charged to gather evidence from and conduct public hearings with all sectors of Edinburgh's society. And so it did: over 18 months the Commission gathered over 2000 pages of written evidence from some six hundred organisations and conducted public hearings with almost 70 community representatives from all walks of life. The Commission was thus the greatest public participation and fact finding exercise on sustainable development ever conducted in Edinburgh, and, indeed, Scotland.

Daniel Mittler is a graduate of Edinburgh University. He is currently writing a PhD thesis comparing the implementation of sustainability policies in Edinburgh and Wuppertal (Germany). He is based at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. He would like to thank Phil Matthews, Professor Michael Carley, Professor Tim O'Riordan, Kevin Dunion and Rachel Henson for their vital assistance with this paper. Martin Horak and two anonymous referees made useful comments on an earlier draft. Email daniel.mittler@bund.net

BACKGROUND: EDINBURGH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has been a pertinent issue for local authorities ever since the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Two thirds of the recommendations included in the Agenda 21 document that was signed by over 100 heads of state at that gathering, require actions by local authorities (Grubb et al 1993). All Councils were charged to develop local implementation blueprints for their Local Agenda 21 in cooperation with their local community (Friends of the Earth Scotland 1995; O'Leary 1996). Edinburgh responded to this new agenda quite swiftly. From 1992-1994, an Edinburgh Vision process was conducted. Much like the Lord Provost Commission, it aimed to ascertain the public's opinion on sustainable development and suggest ways forward towards Edinburgh, Sustainable City. However, this process lacked the necessary political clout. It may have facilitated increased communication between different sectors of Edinburgh's professional community, but it failed to make sustainability a key political issue in the city (Greig and Rydin 1994). Furthermore, in 1994, an environmental review was commissioned to judge Edinburgh's environmental performance. This report had little identifiable impact, partly because the Councils that commissioned it were abolished when local government in Scotland was restructured in 1996 (Midwinter 1995). The report did, however, recommend the establishment of a permanent Edinburgh Environmental Forum (Touche Ross 1994, p.79); this body was indeed created in 1995 and continues to operate. It runs under the name of Edinburgh Environment Partnership and it recommended the establishment of a Lord Provost Commission to the new City of Edinburgh Council. Indirectly, therefore, the legacy of the 1994 environmental review does persist.

Independently, the City of Edinburgh Council has also created a number of bodies charged with the creation and implementation of sustainability policies. For example, a Local Agenda 21 Sub-Committee has been attached to the Policy and Resources Committee of the Council and the Environment Unit has produced an Environmental Strategy for the city which defines a comprehensive set of policy targets and sustainability indicators (City of Edinburgh Council 1997). The Lord Provost Commission was thus not created in a vacuum and it did not have a monopoly on defining sustainable development in Edinburgh. Rather, it was a continuation of previous efforts at establishing a Local Agenda 21 for Edinburgh. The Commission was charged to advise the Council as well as the community at large as to how Edinburgh could move more swiftly and effectively towards sustainability.

AIMS

But the Commission's remit was even wider and more complicated than that. The Commission was not only to advise, but also to take stock. It was to establish how familiar the Edinburgh public currently is with the notion and practice of sustainable development. Has the 'spirit of Rio' arrived in Edinburgh's offices? And, simply by asking companies and the public to specify their response to the sustainability agenda, the Commission was intended to stimulate people to rethink their current practices and identify possibilities for improvements. Both within the Council and among the public at large, furthermore, the Commission was to 'raise the profile of

The Public Funding of Vocational Education and Training in Scotland
Agenda 21 and sustainable development' (Child 1997). The Commission's task, therefore, was a potent mix: it was to provide an audit of current practice, a blueprint for a more sustainable future, and it was to be an advocate for sustainability within the community at large.

PROCESS

The work of the Commissioners, who were all volunteers, and the one-person secretariat based within the Strategic Policy Department of the City of Edinburgh Council, was thus much more challenging and varied than 'simply' to gather evidence and to conduct six full-day public hearing sessions. The Commissioners gave public talks on the work of the Commission and asked for further advice on Edinburgh University's environmental email network Green.Info; the secretariat published a number of press releases which generated public awareness (McGhee 1997; MacLeod 1997; Hume 1998; Walker 1998; Morrison 1998); the Chair himself published his views in the Edinburgh **Evening News** (McLaughlan 1997); and the secretariat patiently answered questions by members of the public (such as myself).

At the heart of the process, nonetheless, were the written submissions and, in particular, the six public hearings. Both in their written and oral evidence, witnesses were asked to specify the key challenges to Edinburgh's future; the obstacles to moving the city onto a more sustainable path of development; as well as the actions which they themselves had taken (or not) to move their organisations towards sustainability. What was meant by sustainable development was deliberately not defined in these questions, in order to establish how familiar people are with the concept of sustainability and how its relevance to life in Edinburgh is construed. The Commission did, however, give those questioned a hint by specifically demanding of them to address the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The detail and length of the written submissions varied widely. Some organisations simply sent in official documents and wrote only a few lines to each question. Others, such as the Wester Hailes Representative Council, Edinburgh University or Scottish Natural Heritage, sent in lengthy replies putting their own work into the context of current political and economic processes in Edinburgh, Scotland and beyond. In the public hearings, witnesses were given five (!) minutes to summarise what they saw as their key contribution and were then quizzed by the Commission for another 25 minutes. These question periods usually focused on the witness's achievements to date and on their views on barriers to sustainability, often pursuing points which the witness had made in his (see below) written contribution. This was usually effective - but could occasionally be embarrassing for the person in the witness box. For, at least in some cases, the aim of making an organisation rethink its current practices was not achieved through demanding a written submission - at least not among the top brass of that organisation. Instead, some minor employee was ordered to write a reply to the Commission's questionnaire. The representatives of Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd. (LEEL), for example, seemed quite baffled when they were quoted back some of the words of LEEL's own submission. And even where such embarrassing slips didn't happen, there is some evidence that the tedious work of producing a

written reply to the Commission was passed down the institutional ladder. One City of Edinburgh Council department, for example, had a first draft of their submission written by an intern (Laura Merrill, personal communication). To what extent such practices were widespread is difficult to ascertain. Luckily, they were certainly not the norm. In many cases the dedication and commitment of those later questioned was evident from the written submissions - which were at times also followed up by general letters of support or further information.

Each of the public hearings was addressed to a particular sector of society. One was aimed at non government organisations (NGOs), for example, one at business and one each at local and national government. Perhaps having learnt the lesson of the Vision exercise (see above), the Commission aimed high in its selection of witnesses. Though it deliberately invited to the NGO and community hearings some 'grassroots' activists from groups such as the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative or the Lothian cycle campaign, SPOKES (internal Commission document, 29th July 1997), it also specifically targetted the most powerful individuals within the political and economic life of Edinburgh and Scotland. The (then) Scottish Environment Minister, Lord Sewel, thus appeared in front of the Commission, as did the Head of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Alastair Paton. Other prominent participants included the (then) leader of Edinburgh City Council, Keith Geddes; the Council's Chief Executive, Tom Aitchison; the (then) Head of the local economic development agency LEEL, Des Bonnar; the Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, Peter Stillwell; the Principal of Heriot Watt University, Professor Archer; the (then) Head of the City Development Department, Dr. George Hazel; the (then) Convener of the Transport Committee, Professor David Begg; the (then) Managing Director of the local bus company Lothian Regional Transport, Charles Evans; and so on. The Chair, Gerry McLaughlan, clearly had enough influence to ensure that the public hearings, at least, were taken seriously by even the most time-pressed individuals. For example, when the Council Chief Executive wanted to withdraw from appearing before the Commission one day before the relevant hearing, he was persuaded otherwise. When he did appear, he was eager to please and obediently and in a detailed fashion answered all questions posed (Hearing 10 December 1997).

The Commission, thus, did not lack access to the powers that be. And it also made a clear effort to balance the evident elite focus of some hearings by inviting more varied voices to others. However, despite these attempts at even-handedness, some interests remained underrepresented or even ignored. There were only three women on the Commission (see Appendix 1) and the percentage of women who were questioned was negligible. No women were questioned during the national government and the business hearings. Only one woman represented the Council during the local government hearing (Hearings 16 October 1997, 10 December 1997 and 19 January 1998). This was clearly not an intentional move or omission on behalf of the Commission; it was simply the result of aiming at the top of the institutional ladder. That top, in Edinburgh and Scotland as a whole, evidently remains male. And, it appears, exclusively white. No

representative of a visible minority sat on the Commission and none at all appeared in any of the hearings (not even the NGO and community group ones; see O'Leary 1996). Though Edinburgh, for example, recently celebrated the completion of the largest mosque in Scotland, the Muslim community remained excluded from the Commission's deliberations on Edinburgh's future. While this, too, was not the result of a deliberate policy by the Commission, it does raise some doubts about the inclusivity of the Commission's deliberations.

The Commission hearings were mostly good natured affairs. Though the meetings were public, most meetings were attended by only a handful of members of the public. The Commissioners and the witnesses thus harmoniously sat around one table and often conducted conversations on a first name basis. Witnesses were not 'grilled' or attacked, as the Commission wanted them to be supportive of sustainable development. It did not want to scare off people by making excessive demands or by antagonistic questioning (Dunion, personal communication). There was, however, one incidence when events got rather heated. Ironically, perhaps, it was (then) transport convener David Begg, known in Edinburgh and beyond as a keen advocate of sustainable transport policies (Mittler 1999a), who erupted in fury during the local government session. While his anger was mainly due to a misunderstanding, it also pointed to the most contested area of the Commission's remit - the issue of transport and planning (see below). David Begg's rage, in which he defended Edinburgh's record on reducing car travel and on preventing travel through the use of the planning system, not only led to an article in the **Evening News** (McGhee 1997). It also caused a detailed follow up and exchange between the City Development Department and the Commission. In this follow up, the Commission was attacked as being ignorant of the planning process; but, more constructively, a detailed history of Edinburgh's planning decisions and their impact on transport and sustainability was also provided (Hazel 1998). The rift between the Commission and the team responsible for transport and planning (chiefly David Begg and George Hazel) was thus patched up - and the quality of the information available to the Commission much improved. As a result, the Commission's report largely endorses the City Council's own position on transport and planning (see below).

Once all the evidence was gathered in early 1998, a first draft report was produced by the secretariat (Matthews 1998). For a number of reasons this draft was rejected by the Commissioners. The demands it contained were seen as not wide-ranging enough and the report made little direct use of the gathered evidence. Quotes from the evidence were completely lacking. The Commission felt, however, that the report would be more acceptable and convincing to the community at large, if it was clearly based on the evidence that so many individuals and institutions had provided. During the spring months, therefore, several Council employees were seconded to the Strategic Policy Department in order to go through the evidence one more time. The presentation of the report was thus delayed. But by having to summarise the given evidence, several Council employees got better acquainted with sustainability issues in Edinburgh; the aim of raising the profile of Agenda 21 was thus achieved - at least within the Council. And

the report that was presented in the summer months was indeed much improved in content and form.

The climax of the process, then, was the public presentation of the finished report on 13 July 1998 at Edinburgh's City Chambers. The room was packed and, once again, the high calibre and standing of those present was remarkable. Many individuals (mainly academics and Council employees) from other cities in Scotland were also present (Lord Provost Commission, list of attendees at launch). This suggests that other cities in Scotland may be interested in imitating Edinburgh in setting up new public-private partnership bodies such as the Commission. If so, the launch probably encouraged them. The Lord Provost himself welcomed the report and saw it as a needed blueprint during the most exciting and significant period in Edinburgh's history since the Scottish Enlightenment (Walker 1998). Without having studied its 127 recommendations in any detail, he gave his support to the main demands (see below) and said that he would be very surprised if the Council did not follow suit.

THE EVIDENCE OR: WHOSE SUSTAINABILITY?

The process of its deliberations was essential to the work of the Commission. The public hearings and the requirement of written submissions got people thinking and provided an opportunity for media work. As a result of this process, however, the Commission also amassed a most varied and detailed survey of Edinburgh's social, economic and environmental conditions - perhaps the most complete survey ever produced in the city's history. Space does not allow a complete recounting of this evidence here. (The written submissions and summaries of the oral evidence are, however, publicly available and can be studied at the Council Information Centre, St. Giles St., Edinburgh.) I can only provide a flavour of the evidence.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, greatly differing views of the challenges ahead and of the possible meaning of a Sustainable Edinburgh were expressed by the different groups that gave evidence. There was, however, also consensus on two points. Confirming commonly held assumptions about the social inclusiveness of Scottish culture, the vast majority of witnesses - from business as much as from government and community groups - viewed poverty and social exclusion as a, if not *the*, key challenge to be confronted and overcome. Edinburgh was viewed as a divided city in which great wealth and unacceptable levels of poverty exist side by side. Lothian Health illustrated this candidly by pointing out that the death rate (expressed as the percentage of deaths before the age of 65) is three times higher in poor Granton than in Balerno, a wealthy suburban district with the highest life expectancy in the city. The need to break through the cycle of poverty, to provide long term support to urban regeneration projects - particularly in Pilton/Muirhouse/Granton, Craigmillar/Niddrie and Wester Hailes - and to improve training and educational opportunities for the poor, was universally acknowledged. Support for better insulated housing that all could afford to heat irrespective of their income, was also extremely widespread. Such a policy, many argued, would be ideal for sustainable development, as it

would not only improve the quality of life of the poor but would at the same time reduce heating-related greenhouse gas emissions.

The only other problem area that was mentioned by as many witnesses (39 in the public hearings) was the issue of transport and air pollution. As 90% of Edinburgh's air pollution is the direct result of road traffic, the two issues are inextricably linked (Friends of the Earth Scotland 1996b). Studying the evidence in more detail, however, it becomes evident that, in this case, the consensus was more apparent than real. For, while everybody agreed that congestion and air pollution are undesirable, the actions that they thus demanded varied. While SPOKES called for more cycling facilities, more action against people parking on cycle paths and an end to out-of-town shopping developments which generate further traffic, Forth Ports plc, in contrast, demanded an extra west-east road link to their harbour facilities in Leith, and Planning Convener, Bob Cairns, called for a mix of retail facilities, with space-intensive and travel-intensive developments located at the edge of the city. Therefore, ironically, the consensus that something needs to be done about congestion and air pollution quickly disintegrated into a fierce contest over what needs to be done to manage future traffic growth. In this battle of minds few, like Forth Ports plc, unequivocally called for further road building. Some, however, did so implicitly. LEEL, for example, praised its own role in regenerating the Granton harbour area - a project which necessitates the building of a new road from Crewe Toll and which will inevitably generate further traffic (Dixon 1998). Most business witnesses, more subtly, were interested in reducing car travel, but usually not for environmental reasons. They simply wanted extra space for their trucks on the roads, in order to increase their speed and number (see evidence 16 October 1997). The representatives of the Council, meanwhile, were torn. They acknowledged that the development of edge-of-town shopping centres such as the Gyle, Kinnaird Park or Cameron Toll over the last ten years had had negative environmental, social and economic effects. The Gyle, for example, generates an extra 200,000 car kilometres in Edinburgh every day and small Corstorphine shop owners have lost 80% of their trade since it opened in 1994 (Hazel 1997). The Council also supported, in principle, the desirability of gearing city development towards the centre. Council employees endorsed the aim of a dense, mixed-use city centre where people can live and work in the same neighbourhood.

Nonetheless, they also backed a new edge-of-town, low-density suburb, called South East Wedge, and did not rule out allowing both Kinnaird Park and the Gyle to expand (as they indeed have since been given permission to do). They tried to make sense of this apparent contradiction by providing detailed plans for an improvement of public transport services to these sites. A railway line is to link up Kinnaird Park with the centre, for example, whereas high speed and high frequency bus services are planned for the Gyle as well as the South East Wedge. These services, they argued, would ensure that the generation of extra car travel is curtailed. People would choose to travel by public transport instead. Representatives of environmental organisations were nonetheless not convinced. They attacked the South East Wedge development as suburban sprawl that fails to live up to high environmental standards (Morrison 1998), and insisted that the

planning system should be used to discourage car travel. Further edge-of-town retail facilities were thus opposed outright as 'the continued growth in road building and out of town shopping centres is destroying the ... city' (Capital Rail Action Group, written submission).

But transport, air pollution and planning was only the most evident and frequently mentioned contested issue. Views on sustainable development in general also varied widely (for a general introduction to different conceptions of sustainability, read Reid 1995). Many admitted that they were not sure what sustainability meant and had so far failed to operationalise the concept in their day-to-day activities. This confirmed the view of the Institute of Environmental Management that 'many of Edinburgh's key institutions appear not to have recognized the challenge ahead' (Institute of Environmental Management, written submission). The Leader of the Council, in a similar vein, claimed that 'not all senior managers in the Council are putting environmental issues at the top of their list of priorities' (Lord Provost Commission 1998, p.20). Those that did define their view of sustainability, meanwhile, often defined social, environmental and economic sustainability separately (rather than as aspects of the same concept, as suggested by the Commission's questionnaire). This led to some absurd constructions of what sustainability might mean. Both Forth Ports plc and East of Scotland Water, for example, argued that they looked after economic sustainability by cutting cost - and staff (Forth Ports plc and East of Scotland Water, written submissions). This view was in stark contrast to, say, the Community Enterprises's view of economic sustainability. To them, sustainable development was about creating jobs through the local provision of services and goods to all sectors of society (Community Enterprise Ltd., written submission). This, certainly, is much closer to the view expressed in Agenda 21. Many institutions, including Heriot Watt and Edinburgh Universities, meanwhile, conflated the concepts of sustainability and eco-efficiency. Sustainable development was thus to be achieved mainly through technological change. An increase in the environmental productivity of the existing economic system was all that the call for a sustainable city implied. The question of whether certain developments, such as out of town shopping centres, may simply be incompatible with sustainability was not even raised by these contributions; radical lifestyle changes were not viewed as necessary. The voluntary sector, in contrast, insisted that sustainability was about nothing if not about changing lifestyles. The Scottish Ecumenical Environmental Network observed, for example, that 'we will make little progress if we do not recognise that the radical changes needed for sustainability, demand a revolution ... in public awareness and lifestyle' (SEEN, written submission).

Similarly, there was no agreement on whether continued economic growth was desirable or outright contradictory to the aim of urban sustainability. The Chamber of Commerce, for instance, saw the sustainability challenge as achieving 'the right balance between [a] protection of the physical environment and economic growth' and Scottish Homes advocated 'sensitive and appropriate growth' (Chamber of Commerce and Scottish Homes, written contributions). The Cockburn Association despaired at such views, arguing that we need to come 'to grips with the notion that sustained growth

does not mean sustainable development' (Cockburn Association, written contribution). Similar views were expressed by other groups, e.g Friends of the Earth Scotland and the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative (also see Mittler 1999b).

At times these divergent views of sustainability could (at least) be entertaining. LEEL's representatives, for example, thought they were on safe grounds when they argued that their creation of local jobs for the long-term unemployed at a biscuit factory was an example of social and economic sustainability. But Commissioner Helen Zealley of Lothian Health begged to differ. Biscuits production could hardly be considered sustainable, she argued, as far too many Scots die each year due to their excessively sweet teeth and their resulting bad diet (Hearing 19 January 1998)

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, despite the consensus on social equity, the Commission was faced with widely differing views on what a sustainable Edinburgh would (have to) look like. Views were divergent, or even dramatically opposed, on general issues such as economic growth, just as much as on specific matters, like the desirability (or not) of building the South East Wedge suburb. The evidence, therefore, did not allow the Commission to simply add up the various views it had heard. It had to select, prioritise and make value judgements in order to produce its report. Again, space does not allow a review of all the 127 individual recommendations the Commissioners finally decided to make. Suffice it to say that these recommendations are aimed at all sectors of society - though the greatest single chunk (about 30%) is reserved for the City of Edinburgh Council. Recommendations vary from the - more numerous - general ones (e.g. 'Indicators of sustainable development [should] be created for Scotland', Lord Provost Commission 1998, p.52) to specific demands on a certain sector or organisation (e.g. 'all businesses in the city with more than 50 employees [should] develop an environmental management strategy covering purchasing, waste management and energy use, which sets firm targets for year on year reduction in resource use', *ibid.*, p.41). In the contested area of transport, air pollution and planning, the Commission took on board some demands made by community groups. It, for example, calls for a crackdown on cars parking on cycle lanes (*ibid.*, p.58). On the whole, however, it endorses the views and plans of the Council and simply calls on the Council to live up to its own promises (also see Appendix 2). The South East Wedge development, for instance, is not opposed. Though the Commission expresses its disappointment at the current plans for this suburb, it only turns this disappointment into the demand that 'explicit account [is taken] of sustainable development principles' when the suburb is actually built (*ibid.*, p.63). What this may mean in practice, the Commission does not say. The plans to link up out of town shopping centres with bus and rail links, meanwhile, are endorsed enthusiastically. Kinnaird Park, in particular, is viewed as a 'good opportunity' to show that out-of-town shopping can be made accessible by public transport (*ibid.*, p.61). Whether or not further retailing space should be provided at the edge of town is not clearly spelled out. The Commission states only that 'where new shopping developments are planned, they should be modest in size and integrated with existing

shops and transport services' (ibid., p.63). But it fails to raise any specific objections to, for example, the then mooted and by now at least partially agreed extensions at the Gyle and at Kinnaird Park.

The clearest recommendations are, in fact, not addressed to any sector or issue but are procedural. Its process was, as we have seen, part of the *raison d'etre* of the Commission's own work. The Commissioners were thus concerned that institutional arrangements were to be set up that would ensure that sustainability remains at the centre of policy making in Edinburgh. Therefore, the Commission's three key recommendations, emphasised in the Conclusion of the report, are the following: first, the creation of a Lord Provost Charter and Award scheme; second, the founding of a permanent Sustainable Edinburgh Partnership; and third, the instigation of a major public awareness campaign on sustainability. It was these recommendations that the Lord Provost himself endorsed at the launch of the report (see above).

The Lord Provost Charter is to consist of a number of sustainability criteria that firms and institutions which sign the charter would endeavour to implement (see Appendix 3). An annual award would be given to that institution which had made the most significant progress towards meeting, or even overshooting, the goals laid down in the charter. The Sustainable Edinburgh Partnership would continue the public-private partnership and knowledge exchange that was a key part of the Commission's remit. It would consist of representatives from all sectors of society - government, NGOs, business, community groups, unions and (even) quangos. If approved by the Council, the Partnership would meet every year during the Council's well established Festival of the Environment which takes place in September. The hope of the Commission is that this body can ensure 'direct contact at a city level between different interest groups necessary to deliver sustainability' (Lord Provost Commission 1998, p.83). The awareness raising campaign, finally, is aimed at overcoming the apparent ignorance and confusion that still surrounds the issue of sustainability (see above). It is meant to be led by the City Council and should emphasise the 'benefits to Edinburgh' that sustainability policies can deliver (ibid., p.84).

WHAT NEXT?

It is not yet fully known whether these procedural recommendations will be implemented. The Lord Provost's support, however, will most likely ensure that at least something similar to the proposed initiatives is indeed going to be pursued. As regards the Charter and the awareness campaign, this is almost certainly good news (but see Appendix 3). A charter will define measurable targets for success - and allow the public to judge whether business and other sectors are responding to the sustainability agenda. An awareness campaign, meanwhile, is clearly needed, and will hopefully make everyone understand why, for example, cutting jobs cannot be construed as economic sustainability. The Sustainable Edinburgh Partnership, however, is most likely going to be a waste of time. Similar bodies have been set up all over Britain as part of Local Agenda 21 initiatives by other Councils. And all of them, sadly, have become little more than powerless, useless talking shops. A body that only meets once a year is not even effective in establishing trust among participants; only far more frequent get togethers

can ensure that. And a body that cannot suggest policy or evaluate progress, e.g. by the Council, is bound to be an aimless institution feeding on itself.

CONCLUSION

Edinburgh is a booming and prosperous city. But it is also a socially divided and polluted one. Through the work of the innovative public-private partnership institution that was the Lord Provost Commission, Edinburgh now has a far better information base than most cities on which to judge her current performance. The Commission did not include everyone in its deliberations, but - for a limited period at least - it succeeded far better than previous efforts in making sustainable development a prominent issue in the Capital and in charting the public's demands and views. Not least by exposing widespread ignorance, as well as the diversity of definitions that are attached to the term sustainability, the Commission has done Edinburgh's citizens a great service. From now on, claiming ignorance is no longer a valid excuse. The sheer existence of the high-powered Commission showed the responsibility of all to engage with the post-Rio world of sustainable development. The 127 recommendations which the Commission made are, as we have seen, often general, vague, and, as in the field of transport and planning, far more anodyne than many who contributed to the process had evidently hoped. But there is nonetheless little doubt that if all of them were to be implemented 'Edinburgh would be the most environmentally-friendly city in the UK' (Morrison 1998). Other cities and citizens in Scotland can thus learn from the Commission's report. But they should also beware of the Commission's weaknesses (also see Appendix 3).

Clearly, even more effort needs to be put into including all sectors of society when discussing plans for the future. Women and ethnic minorities, in particular, need to be specifically targeted. And, if fine words are to be turned into practice, a better institutional set up than the proposed Sustainable Edinburgh Partnership is required. Edinburgh needs a well endowed watchdog on sustainability that is allowed to question all sectors of the community regularly on their progress; that produces public reports on current failings; and that can suggest effective policies to the Council and perhaps even the Scottish Parliament. If such institutional arrangements are not put into place, the danger is great, that the Commission's report, like that of the Edinburgh Vision exercise and the Touche Ross consultancy, will simply gather dust on Council shelves.

Edinburgh has just become a true Capital city once more. As the Capital, Edinburgh has the obligation to lead the way towards a socially just and environmentally benign path of development for Scotland. In the 18th century, 'Edinburgh nurtured the Enlightenment; maybe it is appropriate that it nurtures a sustainable version of that great age.' (O'Riordan 1998).

APPENDIX 1

Commissioners

Gerry McLaughlan	(Transco Bg plc) - Chair
Tim Birley	(Advisor on Sustainable Development and Public Policy)
Michael Carley	(Heriot Watt University)
Maureen Child	(Councillor, The City of Edinburgh Council)
Roger Talbot	(University of Edinburgh)
Kevin Dunion	(Friends of the Earth Scotland)
John Forbes	(Midlothian Enterprise Trust)
Patricia Henton	(Scottish Environment Protection Agency)
Eoghan Howard	(Wester Hailes Representative Council)
Richard Leonard	(GMB Union)
John Mulvey	(Scottish Local Government Forum Against Poverty)
Sebastian Tombs	(Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland/ Scottish Ecological Design Association)
Trevor Rae	(Hewlett Packard Limited)
Helen Zealley	(Lothian Health)
Phil Matthews	(Secretary to the Commission)

APPENDIX 2

During the Festival of the Environment in September 1998, the Commission presented its report to a wider public in what was anticipated to be, in effect, the first ever meeting of the new Sustainable Edinburgh Partnership. During this meeting, the Commission very forcefully attacked the Council's (then) recent decision to allow the building of an IKEA furniture store on the south-eastern fringe of the city. This decision, which had been taken after the Commission's report had been published, was seen as contradicting the environmental commitments the City of Edinburgh Council had made (not least in its transport strategy) as well as Edinburgh's structure plan. The IKEA store, the Commission argued, will generate substantial amounts of extra traffic - and thus also cause greenhouse gas emissions to rise. The Commission, by opposing IKEA in no uncertain terms, proved that its policy of demanding that the Council live up to its own promises and commitments does have political teeth. The Commission's opposition to the IKEA store does, however, not signify a further conflict with the (then) key

people responsible for planning at the City of Edinburgh Council. These, though they failed to gain a majority in the Council, also oppose the IKEA development. David Begg, for example, at the meeting in September, called the decision to allow the IKEA store to go ahead 'the worst decision in my twelve years as a Councillor' and admitted that it 'drives horse and cart through our own structure plan'.

APPENDIX 3

In April 1999, a Lord Provost Charter was launched with some style at the recently opened Dean Gallery in Edinburgh. More than hundred business and community leaders were invited to the launch. Quite a number attended - though some representatives from non-environmental Quangos admitted to me that 'we are not quite sure why we are here'. By early May, 31 organisations and individuals had signed up to the Charter, which, for the moment, is little more than a general list of demands and aspirations, ranging from achieving best environmental practice to sourcing locally. Not many of the original Commissioners turned up at the launch. And the media did not give the Charter any coverage (the launch happened too near the Scottish parliamentary elections). While the commitment to implement a Lord Provost's Charter has been honoured, therefore, its impact has so far been muted and less than had been hoped by many. Some former Commissioners have, as a result, already grown disillusioned with the lack of results that the Commission has so far produced (Graham White at the Edinburgh Book Festival, 22 August 1999). This is understandable, as a public awareness campaign has not even been implemented. While the Commission's findings are now available on the web, and references to the charter are included in Edinburgh's A-Z guide to Council services, little to nothing has happened in terms of awareness raising for sustainable development in the city. No second public meeting of the Sustainable Edinburgh Partnership took place during the 1999 Festival of the Environment.

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