

Music Tuition charges to be abolished as Green budget amendment agreed

Following negotiations between Green councillor Ian Baxter and the SNP/Independent coalition on Midlothian Council, the coalition agreed to accept a Green amendment to abolish music tuition charges over two academic years, starting in August 2015. In return, Cllr Baxter agreed to support other measures contained in the budget.



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The Greens have always prioritised an education service free to all, consistently opposing tuition fees for university students.

Commenting on the move, Councillor Baxter said, “Charges act as a disincentive to those whose income is low but who do not qualify for assistance. It is particularly important that the opportunity to learn to play an instrument is available from a young age, and the wider benefits are well documented. One report published in Canada suggested that six year olds learning an instrument had, on average, a seven point IQ increase over the course of a year compared to those not learning”.

Other proposals put forward by the Greens a year ago are also being progressed, including an investigation into webcasting council meetings and a move to produce the Midlothian News freesheet in electronic format only.

The council is also now looking seriously at developing publicly owned renewable energy, as contained in last year’s Green Budget proposals.

Greens oppose Midlothian Local Development Plan

Midlothian Council approved the proposed Local Development Plan in December, opposed only by local Green councillor Ian Baxter. Cllr Baxter said the plans for a new road beside the A701 and doubling the size of Straiton Retail Park “offered a 1960s solution to a 2014 problem”.

Cllr Baxter said, “Reports published worldwide show that building more roads encourages more traffic and the plan offers no solution to the additional cross-Midlothian traffic which will be generated. This plan offers little in the way of sustainability”.



Damhead residents protest outside Midlothian House against A701 plans

20 mph zone for Lasswade

The council has agreed to implement 20 mph speed limits in Lasswade on a 12 month pilot basis, following pressure by Cllr Ian Baxter that this be added to the council's 20 mph zone proposals.

When a proposal by the council's Labour Group to include 20 mph zones in six areas across Midlothian was ruled out, Cllr Baxter argued that Lasswade is a special case. With the Lasswade issue having come before the council's Petitions Committee and been the



subject of a detailed report by the council's Roads Department, he contended that, while he supported the Labour proposal, a pilot in Lasswade

could be implemented much more easily and should be used as a learning exercise for other areas.

Bonnyrigg Leisure Centre

Agreement in principle has been reached between Midlothian Council and Bright Sparks on the layout of the building. The council also says it is 'exploring options for further facilities for use by the local community and these include a soft play area and cafe'.

We are pleased that the council has confirmed that the building can be shared between Bright Sparks and other organisations in the community as this was previously presented as an obstacle to general community use of part of what is a very big building. Cllr Baxter is continuing to press for the building to be shared by Bright Sparks, the Bonnyrigg Community Hub and Bonnyrigg & Sherwood Development Trust, as many people in the community tell us they would like to see.

Broadband



Following constant pressure from Cllr Baxter over the last few months, Openreach is now indicating that Cabinets 49 and 50 (at the bottom of the map on the left) may now be upgraded to fibre in 2016 rather than 2017 as he was originally told. We will be monitoring the situation over the next year

and seeking clarification regarding other areas of Hopefield, Gladstone's Gait and Polton Road still awaiting upgrade.

Councillor Expenses

For the second year running, Councillor Ian Baxter claimed no councillor expenses last year, and was the only Midlothian councillor to do so. Full information is on the Midlothian Council web site (under 'Councillors').

Councillor Ian Baxter's contact details

Telephone: 0131 663 4294 (Home)

Email: Ian.Baxter@midlothian.gov.uk (Council)

07792 720421 (Mobile)

0131 271 3094 (Council)

Surgeries:

2nd Monday of month (7-8pm), Bonnyrigg Primary School

3rd Wednesday of month (6-7pm), Poltonhall Recreation Ground meeting room

Please note: There are no surgeries during school holidays

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