Edinburgh Tram Inquiry Office Use Only
Witness Name: Dr Colin MacKenzie
Dated:

The Edinburgh Tram Inquiry

Witness Statement of Dr Colin MacKenzie

Statement taken by Adam Hoy on 1 September 2016.

My full name is Dr Colin MacKenzie. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Statement:

1. I am the owner of Hi Fi Corner Ltd, it is a long established audio retailer. It was formed in 1971 and bought the assets of an existing established retailer WG Graham's Hi Fi Corner and traded at the same premises at 1 Haddington Place, Leith Walk, Edinburgh. It was situated near the city's east end near to Gayfield Square and opposite Elm Row. At the time of the tram works, Hi Fi Corner was operating from three premises; 1 Haddington Place, Edinburgh 121 Rose Street, Edinburgh and 44 Cow Wynd, Falkirk. Hi Fi Corner had been operating from 121 Rose Street, Edinburgh since 1979.

2. When the tram works appeared on Leith Walk the business went down. It was difficult to park, do demonstrations and load and unload goods. I was offered help by TIE to load and unload as the loading bay had been moved. This help consisted of persons coming to the new loading and unloading area to carry or move goods to and from the store. However, when help arrived they told us that they could not move boxes because of health and safety reasons. Couriers often would not wait for help to arrive, which resulted in loss of deliveries and uplifts. During the time of the tram-works on Leith Walk I made a conscious effort to move the business to the branch on 121 Rose Street, Edinburgh. However, when the tram-works moved to the west end the business suffered a severe downturn. I was informed by customers that they could not get near us to park, and when some customers managed to find my store on Haddington Place, they stated that they would not go to Rose Street due to the road works. Individual store information shows a drop when works

were started and an increase when works concluded. More customers were lost than retained. Despite the support of my landlords, Joint Properties Ltd, with a substantive rent reduction, I reluctantly had to surrender my lease at 121 Rose St, Edinburgh. My last trading day was 30 April 2011. I had been trading successfully from this store for over twenty years. I attended many public meetings in relation to the trams project. At one of these meetings I asked a Councillor Wheeler why the parking was being taken away from such a wide part of the street at Haddington Place, to which he stated, "I never looked at the plans in that level of detail". The argument put forward by the council was that the parking was just being moved to side streets, however, this was unacceptable as customers and staff need to lift sizeable boxes. This showed a lack of knowledge at decision makers' level and a lack of empathy for small to medium businesses.

3. On a personal level, I found this period to be very stressful. I have never been so stressed in business. The value of my business dropped by £300,000 over the period of 2009 to 2012. Having to make people redundant, closing a store and seeing additional family stress has been one of the worst times in my life. I was in nearly in tears begging for a rent reduction on Rose Street. I have had health problems since that period, which I believe the Trams Project has contributed to.

4. The specific issues that affected the business were parking issues and the noise from constant digging machinery, which dissuaded people from entering the store.

5. I complained about these issues on the dedicated phone line provided and by attending numerous public meetings to vent my frustrations. The Leith Traders Association was formed, so that our voices could be heard as a collective, but I felt ignored by the council. I cannot recall if I complained to any one person individually.

6. I felt my complaints were dealt with inefficiently. More often than not, nobody called me back. Although I was offered help with loading and unloading of

goods, I found this to be ineffective as the helpers that arrived were not able to lift boxes for health and safety reasons.

7. I cannot recall specifically the extent of communication between the Tram Project and I, but I remember there was an ineffective website for updates, with very little information. At public meetings I felt as if I was talked to, not listened to. Every plan that was proposed was never carried out effectively. At one Leith Traders Association meeting TIE suggested closing "the whole of Leith Walk" for months "in order to get the work done quicker". I'm not sure whether any businesses would have been left operating if that had happened.

8. The type and quality of information provided to me before and during the work in my area was non-existent. I was never thoroughly informed of what was going on. Nobody on Leith Walk realised the magnitude of what was going to happen. I was never told about parking issues until it was too late. I felt that there was a general lack of knowledge by all concerned. At public meetings when Councillor Phil Wheeler was asked any questions, he could not answer them, he even said we "were lucky as the people in Ireland didn't get any help with their rates". At one point I phoned to say that I did not expect, nor would I allow, any tram power cables to be attached to my building, they were unable to tell me where the tramlines were going.

9. I was aware of the Business Compensation Package, but I was not eligible to receive it, as the rateable value of my business was more than £28,000. The £4000 offered would have been a drop in the ocean anyway.

I confirm that the facts to which I attest in this witness statement, consisting of this and the preceding two pages are within my direct knowledge and are true. Where they are based on information provided to me by others, I confirm that they are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

Witness signature.....

Date of signing.....5/10/16.....