

# PICARDY PLACE PROPOSALS – AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE SEIZED ?

NTBCC attended the drop in session at Café Camino in December 2013 where Henderson Global Investors (HGI) aired outline proposals for Picardy Place.

This was a pre-application consultation exercise ([Ref. 13/03853/PAN](#)) designed to sound public opinion in advance of more detailed plans which will be shown at another event later in 2014 although no date has been planned as yet.

Although this proposal is at a very early stage and many people will be unaware of the plans so far as they have been developed - now is the right time to at least think about the principles rather than the detail of these proposals. The New Town & Broughton Community Council, along with other representative groups have already made a representation questioning whether the impact on traffic flows has been fully considered and asking what this proposed development brings to the residents and communities of Edinburgh but we always welcome and would actively encourage others to share their views of the options currently proposed.

In 2009, City of Edinburgh Council approved Development Principles for Picardy Place with the aim of improving this gateway **'from a city-centre roundabout prioritising traffic movement to a high quality public place/development area'**. The site has been designated as an area where development will be encouraged which **'maintains and enhances the character, attractiveness, vitality and accessibility of the city centre'**.

This aim has been further developed in the outline proposals by Henderson Global Investors (HGI) to:

1. **Recreate the principal street edge to the north side of the site**
2. **Provide a high quality public open space**
3. **Signal an important gateway to the city centre**
4. **Define the Leith Street / Leith Walk urban corridor**
5. **Maximise pedestrian and cycle movement and use.**

Both options put forward by HGI envisage:

- integrating a hotel 'with active ground-floor uses' (i.e. shops/services) into the wider St James Quarter proposals for the benefit of local residents.
- aligning with the protected (possible) future tram route running further down Leith Walk - final destination to be confirmed.....
- enhancing the area as a setting for buildings, in terms of pedestrian links, and as a route between Leith and the City Centre
- the area becoming a transport hub if/when the temporary tram stop on York Place is moved to Picardy Place, which we believe is the plan of CEC Transport Department .

**Option 1** is for a triangular 'perimeter block' hotel, providing public space around all three 'active frontages'. The hotel, with one prominent corner facing Leith, would block views of St Mary's Cathedral from Leith Walk (and vice versa), but create a 'substantial space' in front of the cathedral. This 'space' would seem to comprise a comparatively narrow pavement area on Broughton Street where today's mostly pedestrianised section of road includes the Paolozzi statues and St Mary's

Market.

**Option 2** is for a boomerang-shaped building (see below) with a 'potential open space' on the northern side. This would also block the view of St Mary's Cathedral from Leith Walk, but provide an open aspect towards it from the possible future tram stop located probably just past the Tesco Express.

#### **What do we think ?**

NTBCC (New Town and Broughton Community Council) recognises that this area has undergone several transformations from the originally constructed Picardy Place which was demolished in the 1960's and as such, the current set-up could be improved significantly. We are also not against restoring the original triangular street pattern here.

NTBCC shares the misgivings of many local residents, as reported in The Spurtle, such as shifting the current quality public space from Broughton Street outside the Cathedral – where it is separated from the busy traffic negotiating the island and partially screened by greenery – to any outer edge of a space encircled with traffic for most of the day.

We do support the objective that the character of the site be changed from a roundabout prioritising traffic movement to a high quality public space designed around the needs of pedestrians. However, it has to be recognised that the Picardy Place junction will remain a vital traffic intersection even after the commencement of the Edinburgh tram route and this will increase the complexity of traffic management further.

We support the proposed straightening of York Place as it runs in front of Picardy Place Terrace towards Leith Walk.

We believe that both options attempt to shoe-horn a larger than acceptable hotel into this area – driven by the desire to rehouse the current King James Thistle hotel.

We believe that the proposed options do not adhere to commonly-accepted desire lines for pedestrian movement in this area. The options would seem to reposition pedestrian uses at the traffic's centre. Those on foot would require to cross busy roads to reach the proposed, traffic-encircled spaces and ground-floor attractions opposite. The majority of the pedestrian traffic would not be attempting to access the proposed hotel or its public amenity services. It is also unclear whether the full interaction and impact between the potential new tram route towards Leith Walk, traffic movements from Leith Walk to York Place and towards Broughton have been correctly assessed.

We don't see anything in the proposals to suggest how cycle movements will be maximised ; it is also unclear how the proposed east-west George Street cycle lane would integrate with this scheme.

Again, we share Spurtle's concerns that "Far from maintaining or enhancing the 'character, attractiveness, vitality and accessibility' of this part of the city centre, the proposal appears to quantitatively and qualitatively diminish it".

The full submission by NTBCC to the Pre Application Consultation can be seen [here](#).

Our preferred solution would be some form of a new public space to replace the public space that may be lost in front of the Cathedral and Picardy Place; **but what do you think ?**