

Public Meeting of Stakeholders - George Street Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO).

Minute of meeting, held on 17 March 2015 at the Assembly Rooms, George Street, Edinburgh.

Chair & minutes – Iain MacPhail, City Centre Programme Manager, City of Edinburgh Council.

**(1) Thanks & Introduction/Purpose of the Meeting**

- Thanks and appreciation were expressed to everyone in attendance. As there was standing room only at the back of the room, more seating will be provided at the next meeting (June).
- These meetings are, hopefully, strong evidence of a renewed approach from the Council, where we are committed to putting people first, taking a bottom-up (rather than top-down) approach, and including all stakeholders in issues that affect them. The near-capacity attendance was welcomed and appreciated, and a range of interests were represented including the local community council, Business Improvement District, cyclists, people with disabilities, taxis, long haul bus operators, Lothian Buses, individual local businesses (from George Street and surrounding streets), members of the public, the Emergency Services, Edinburgh World Heritage Trust, voluntary sector transport agencies and a wide range of Council departments including the local neighbourhood, planning and transport functions.
- These meetings take place quarterly. In a spirit of transparency and ensuring the integrity of the design process, meetings are open to members of the public as well as those with specific expertise, and all are welcome. The last meeting (in December 2014) had closed with the message that Edinburgh City Centre benefits from having a passionate and engaged local community, a range of expertise that extends to being world class (in relation to heritage matters for example) and a successful economy led by sharp businesses and business leaders. This meeting, quite appositely, began from that same point, and all groups were thanked for their interest, attendance and contributions.
- The group aims to harness all these positives, in a project that does inevitably create some points of tension and competition between stakeholders.
- The overriding purpose of the group is to act as an oversight group in charge of the research package that accompanies the George Street ETRO. Put simply, the group checks whether the researchers are asking the right questions. It was acknowledged that, in putting stakeholders in charge of the research package (be they businesses, experts, members of the public) the Council has taken quite a risk, but that this has been the right thing to do – the research is helping to put in place a key baseline of information for the city centre that will be useable for all planning, design, economic development and transport decisions in the city for a considerable period of time to come.

**(2) Update on City Centre Vision** – provided by Iain MacPhail. Please see attached presentations. These were provided as handouts on the day to all attendees, documents named “City Centre Vision Update March 2015” & “March 2015 CCV&Geo Public Meeting”

Key issues covered during the presentation & subsequent discussion:

- George Street does not exist in a vacuum. There is a wider City Centre Vision that it sits within. Moreover, there are spaces in Edinburgh that in recent years have been reworked, pedestrianised, and these projects have highlighted important learning, outlined below.

## City Centre Vision

Aligned with Council vision...for Edinburgh to have a thriving, successful & sustainable city centre,

Around strategic themes of

Improving the quality of life, Ensuring economic vitality, Building excellent places

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Delivered through projects on the Development, Management & Promotion of the city centre

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Approach in the past – Top Down, plan-led, map-based, concentrated on transport & public realm

Coming into post I've asked 2 Questions – as a Vision, was it deliverable, was it effective?

Result (1) – stakeholders rejected much of the plan, and sent everyone back to drawing board. Different approach required. Utilising trials and gathering a robust baseline of data on movement & function for different spaces & widespread stakeholder engagement in the Vision-creating process

Result (2) – what do Castle Street & St Andrew Square Gardens reveal to us about the effectiveness of the approach to date?

In summary, transport changes (ie pedestrianisation) & public realm projects, even of excellent quality, do not create an effective sense of place on their own. (*movement, place, heritage, function*)

In public perception the balance of use/function/movement/place/heritage has not been successfully achieved. One space suffers from over-use (a victim of its success), the other from under-use.

Over the past calendar year, talking to local communities, event holders, applicants and officials from 8 different departments, I've asked "so why has this happened / what's needed to create a successful place following a public realm project or transport change" the same answer kept coming back from all stakeholders...

There is a missing piece of the jigsaw & it is of a fundamental, structural nature.

There is no clear strategic statement of what function each space in the city centre should have. A public spaces manifesto is required, so that the spaces created (or changed) by public realm projects and/or transportation changes can then become successful places, that The Vision can be effective.

Any Vision created now (in advance of addressing these issues) runs a significant risk of recreating the "Castle Street Scenario" or the "St Andrew Square Scenario" across the city centre.

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Example – Castle St: no clear way of determining two competing applications, nowhere is it set out what the preferred use is, what would be considered an inappropriate function for that space

More fundamentally (and emblematic) for spaces in Edinburgh City Centre, Castle St ought to be more attractive to activity/events than St Andrew Square Gardens: it's cheaper, pedestrianised, socketed, geared for events, has "that" view. Why is it not being used in the manner envisaged?

- Not to do with economics or logistics, it's to do with the array of different stakeholders and the complex array of needs and considerations to be found in and around the space. Castle Street is emblematic precisely because, like all streets in Edinburgh city centre, it has residents, as well as offices, retailers, hospitality, restaurants, bars, street traders.
- Current arrangements provide no-one with certainty or clarity, and are perceived to offer no significant or meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- Result is that competing requirements of stakeholders means any event or activity proposed will gather opposition from at least one stakeholder group...so nothing is being staged there.
- Example – if you want to put on a market or event, offices will understandably say “great idea, put it on at weekends though as we have meetings during the working week”. Some traders will say “great idea, but I’ve got good footfall at weekends, I think Monday to Friday would work best for this event”. Residents understandably want an evening time limit to prevent noise disturbance at nights, hospitality operators may have different views from all of the above. In summary, every type of event on any given date/time will provide an inconvenience for some stakeholders.
- People’s greatest fear (from talking to a wide variety of groups this past year) is fear of a Precedent – in the absence of clear guidelines on what can happen when & where (and what should not be allowed to take place) there is a fear that “if you allow it once it’ll be back all the time”. By putting in place a more prescriptive document that sets out what the appropriate uses (and what limitations on uses) might be, it gives clarity and certainty to all stakeholders, it allows people to work around any inconvenience with clarity and certainty (ie an office may be able to plan to avoid meetings on a Thursday afternoon if that’s when an event takes place) but the key thing is it is planned, and known about, the impacts can be managed by all stakeholders, and there is no fear of the inconvenience (whatever it may be) recurring on a more frequent basis. It is better still if stakeholders have an input into the creation of the document.
- Castle Street is emblematic of a mixed-use city centre with an historic layout.
- What is needed is stakeholder involvement, clarity & certainty...remove fear of precedent & “nasty surprises”

### **How will this be addressed?**

Report to Corporate Policy & Strategy Committee in May 2015

2 recommendations

- (1) trial arrangements for use/management of Castle Street (and potentially other areas too) and
- (2) undertaking a year-long consultation & research on use/function/management of spaces.

Outcomes from this process will inform longer term Vision (especially around movement & function)

The process and approach will engage stakeholders in the process & address concerns with Top-Down approach.

### **Elsewhere in Edinburgh City Centre**

If Castle Street & St Andrew Square gardens shine a light on some work that is required, a recent experience on the Lawnmarket has shone a light on the many positives that Edinburgh has to offer.

Last year the author Alexander McCall Smith and a number of others were critical of the Council over our perceived treatment of the Old Town, considering that we neglect the Old Town sometimes, and that we do not do enough to celebrate the built heritage and cultural heritage, and we don't do enough to promote Edinburgh's status as the world's inaugural UNESCO World City of Literature.

The Royal Mile team listened and considered these criticisms, and found a small sum of money (in relative terms) to put together a design competition and tender for the design, delivery and installation of two small urban gardens in the Lawnmarket. These were to have a literary theme, should signpost visitors (and locals) to nearby facilities like the libraries, Writer's Museum and Lady Stair's Close, as well as providing seating, planting and a pleasant environment in which people could enjoy (free of charge) the fabulous Medieval surroundings of the Old Town. Mr McCall Smith has become a real champion of this project, and the outcome of the tendering process tells a story.

Despite the small sum of money involved, there were 6 tenderers, and they were of exceptional quality, including some arguably world class entrants. The adjudication process included, to differing degrees, input from stakeholders like Edinburgh World Heritage Trust, Edinburgh World City of Literature, Mr McCall Smith and officials from Planning, Procurement and the City Centre.

The winning entry is from a company whose recent projects include Buckingham Palace gardens, the London 2012 Olympic Park and Village, and the award-winning rooftop gardens on the London HQ buildings of Coca Cola and Google. Their literary theme for Edinburgh's Lawnmarket is to have 2 gardens, of identical shape (one on each side of the Lawnmarket) but with radically different characters...a Dr Jekyll garden and a Mr Hyde garden. Dr Jekyll will be an orderly space, having a grown-up literary theme, featuring quotes, inscriptions and references to local authors (living and from the past), while the Mr Hyde garden will have a much different character, more planting, greater colour, and bear inscriptions and references to childrens' literature from Edinburgh authors through the ages.

It is a reminder that Edinburgh is very attractive to an international audience. People of calibre and stature want to be a part of our city and to help us celebrate the good things that we have. The installation ought to be in place for late summer 2015, and will be initially in place for a year, though if it is well-received this could be made permanent.

On a similar theme, at the West End, a balance of civic spaces has been identified, with the key space being the significant gateway space at Hope Street by Frasers. In this location, the Council has aspirations (working with National Galleries of Scotland, the West End Community Council, West End BID and other local stakeholders) to establish this space as one reserved for civic sculpture, rather than commercial uses. It is hoped to have the original Kelpies (the Kelpie Maquettes) in this space from late June until the end of the Festival as a starting point, working in partnership with all these key stakeholders and the curators at the impressive Helix Park in Falkirk. The themes of deciding on the appropriate use and management of city centre spaces (on the one hand) and celebrating the cultural heritage and built heritage of our city, closely involving stakeholders, are all key themes for the city centre vision.

- (3) George Street research feedback – please see attached document “March 2015 Stakeholder Group Presentation – Research”. Presented by Lorna Shaw of Research Resource.

The underlying trends seemed to still come through consistently.

- There is an increase in footfall on George Street year-on-year (not all streets in the city centre have recorded this increase or trend – source: Essential Trends, produced monthly)
- People visit George Street more frequently now - 90% of respondents visit George Street at least as frequently or more frequently as they did before the trial.
- People linger longer on George Street – typically around the 3 hour mark.
- Interestingly, there are fewer cars on city centre streets than 10 years ago but more people on street.
- The numbers who would oppose or strongly oppose the street having this pedestrian space in the long run amount to just 12% of the sample.

There was discussion on the key themes, noting that there is a dip in sentiment towards the outdoor space recorded during interviews in this quarter.

This could quite feasibly be a seasonal factor (outdoor dining is not prevalent in the winter months). The results of the Spring quarter (March, April, May) due at the next meeting in June will be crucial in determining if winter does represent a seasonal low point in the year when it comes to perception of how to use the outdoor space.

A reasonable conclusion from this quarter’s results is that dining and hospitality is not sufficient on its own to bring vitality to a civic space in Edinburgh during the winter and that a wider range of uses/events/animation (for example farmers market, six nations, mothers day, valentines day themes, curling rink etc) could all be better uses of a prominent civic space during the winter months.

It was highlighted in the meeting that 6% of all respondents have reported having a disability (this is on the presentation slides attached). This group’s feedback has been consistent with the overall feedback, so was not extracted and presented in isolation during this meeting. Attendees expressed that they would like to see information provided by disabled respondents given greater prominence, and this will be acted upon.

The group were supportive of expanding the research project remit to include a bus passenger survey and a survey of businesses.

### **“You Said, We Did...”**

The previous meeting of this group has expressed their opposition to the decking and marquees on the street, and for 2 sound principled reasons it has been reported to businesses that the decking and marquees are not considered to be an appropriate long term solution (this was reported in the press on 31.12.2014). The two points of principle were that on the occasion of a civic event like Light Night the decking and marquees could not be moved. There was a record 30,000 attendance, and it highlighted that these structures had not been able to be removed and had not facilitated the key principle of civic use of civic space in an unhindered manner upon request by the Council. Concerns had been expressed by Public Safety and Police Scotland. The project’s conclusion – which has been publicly reported – was that any on street facilities to enliven the space should be temporary and

removable, to maintain the important point of principle that civic use of civic space is paramount and should be capable of being provided on request.

The second point of principle was that some marquees had been marketed as private dining spaces which was precisely the opposite of the trial's intended purpose, which is to trial different ways of enlivening a space that brings atmosphere to the street (not boxing in the buzz) and in a way that is public and to the benefit of all stakeholders.

### **KEY NEXT STEPS FOR THE PROJECT**

The key issues that were highlighted for attendees were as follows.

- The Council has begun the process of procuring an independent designer
- The designer will work between Spring 2015 and September 2015 (now to trial end)
- They will have 2 key tasks to fulfil.
- In the first half of the time period in question, they will facilitate public meetings where all stakeholders will have the opportunity to input – the purpose of these meetings is to establish the key design principles for the street (establishing the sense of place, movement, function and heritage)
- In the second half of the time period in question (up to Sept 2015) they will then test a full range of design options against the agreed design principles, so in essence every possible permutation can be considered and the reasons for being ruled in (or ruled out) in the long run can be transparently explained.
- Come September 2015, the road will – for a period of time – revert to its previous layout, 2 running lanes in each direction, with all decking, marquees and other installations (inc the current 2 way cycle lane) being removed.
- This is while a Traffic Regulation Order is consulted on and pursued for the long term design and layout of the street (that the independent designer will have helped us move towards).
- As an interim measure, Iain MacPhail of CEC has been tasked to report on what cycling provision could be maintained during that hiatus period at the trial's conclusion.
- This will work on the basis that there will be a return to symmetry on the street as a key design principle (accepted by all in the room) so any cycle provision explored will be on the basis of a more conventional layout (eastbound on north side, westbound on south side of the street) and maintaining low level segregation is key to that being safe.

Date of next meeting – TBC, at the Assembly Rooms, in June 2015.