

Council planning improvements on The Royal Mile



The council has big plans for improving The Royal Mile. Parts of the historic street which lie opposite the City Chambers were part-time pedestrianised some time ago, in a move which planners believe has been to best advantage. The vision announced today is to extend that further, keeping cars and HGVs to a minimum and allowing pedestrians more space to wander. We have a slideshow at the bottom of this article of photos and video of some of the areas to be targeted.

In January 2012 a series of planning charrettes were held to discuss what to do with the street running from the Castle to Holyrood Palace, parts of which are known to be underused. Visitor numbers at Edinburgh Castle are believed to be about three times as high as they are at Holyrood Palace. Edinburgh Castle welcomed 1,314,975 visitors in 2011-12, the most recent figures available and The Royal Collection Trust report 2011-12 states:-“The Palace of Holyroodhouse received 267,000 visitors during the year, an increase of 14 per cent on the previous year (234,000); and a further 53,000 people visited The Queen’s Gallery (up 23.5 per cent from 43,000 in 2010–11) Planners believe that what is needed is a better pedestrian route between the two attractions to encourage tourists and residents alike to walk down the Mile to Holyrood and to visit shops and businesses in between.

The plans are just proposals at present, and the council is now going to consult with all interested parties to firm up what will begin to take shape later in the year. But the planning officials think that once finalised the planned improvements can be brought into effect quite quickly. Some of the plans do not need too much in the way of infrastructure

change, and can be implemented by way of temporary planning measures which can then be made permanent once they are seen to work.

After the planning charrettes in 2012, there was a Royal Mile Spring Clean, and a Royal Mile Manager was employed to oversee what might become a voluntary contract among all the businesses and residents living and working along the historic route, an important milestone in fulfilling the council's vision for the street. The council owns the pavement and indeed owns many of the shops and premises in the High Street. As owner of the pavement space they have legal power to ensure that shops do not display their wares hanging from the exterior which has been greatly criticised in the past.

As landlord of 46 retail properties in the High Street, the council can enforce who gets to lease property from them, and they can impose certain restrictions on the kind of shopfront new tenants create there. This is one of the ways they keep control over the kind of businesses operating along one of the main tourist routes. But it is not just tourists who will benefit from the changes. If the other plans to improve at least some of the closes and the hinterland off the High Street also come to fruition then residents will have a nicer place to live too. Some of the closes are used by those who sleep rough from time to time, and can also be a location for many types of anti-social behaviour, due in part to poor lighting, which is off-putting for tourists and residents alike.

[Edinburgh World Heritage](#) themselves have an office in Bakehouse Close, but have recently been working on compiling a list of the closes in and around the High Street. They thought at the beginning that there were 74 but seem to have discovered two more during their recent investigations and now think that there are 76!

A spokesman for Edinburgh World Heritage said:- "Following the

Twelve Monuments Project, our next major public realm initiative will be to enhance twelve Old Town closes. The project is still being planned, but the aim will be to encourage people to explore the Old Town beyond the Royal Mile and to improve the environment for visitors and residents alike. As the success of the recent [Scotsman Steps](#) project has shown, conservation-led regeneration can be highly effective in bringing public spaces back to life. It is likely that improvements will include lighting, stonework repairs and interpretation.”

Councillor Ian Perry, Planning Convenor, said:-“The plan to increase pedestrian space in the Royal Mile would be of huge benefit to both businesses and the residents who live in the area. If you reduce the amount of cars, you create a better experience for pedestrians. The area outside the City Chambers is a case in point. There was a lot of initial opposition but now it has proved to be a great attraction during the Festival, and at other times of the year, when street performers have a proper area to attract an audience. It is not cars who shop – its people

We would like to have what is called shared space in some areas similar to the situation outside the City Chambers. This will allow cars and delivery loading and unloading at definite times, but buses and pedestrians at all times. We will also be speaking to cycling organisations with a view to improving access to and from High Street.

The possibility of introducing a low emission zone will also be discussed as part of the consultation. Discussions have taken place with Lothian Buses about the possibility of using low emission buses on the 35 route which serves the high street. We hope to improve the environment for pedestrians and enhance their experience.”



The street is to be split into six separate areas, as shown on the map above, stretching from Castlehill to Canongate, with the closes behind included as a separate area. It has been recognised that the street developed from different beginnings and there is a different character in each separate division. The various parts are:-

1. Castlehill
2. Lawnmarket
3. Civic Zone (George IV Bridge – Anchor Close)
4. High Street Zone (Anchor Close – St Mary's Street)
5. Canongate & Holyrood.
6. Closes and Hinterland

The arrangements for Castlehill have still to be discussed with the Army who actually own Edinburgh Castle, but thoughts on changes include moving tour buses to Johnston Terrace rather than allowing them up Castlehill onto the Esplanade.

At Canongate Kirk the area might be raised up so that the road and pavement flow into each other at the same level. This will form a kind of traffic calming barrier which will mean traffic slows, but pedestrians will also find it easier to use. Whether or not any changes would be made at the bottom of the street would have to be discussed with both Holyrood Palace and also The Scottish Government owing to security requirements.

The proposed development at Caltongate might also eventually draw more people down the High Street, although clearly that is still at the planning stages.

The area around the Lawnmarket might become a low emission zone, and Lothian Buses might use a single decker Low Emission vehicle for their number 35 service which goes from the airport to Holyrood. Councillor Perry explained that the council ideal would be to have only public transport buses serving the area, but admitted it is a difficult thing to

enforce any of these restrictions. He said that although the council's long term ambition is to look at local pollution hotspots and the introduction of low emission zones, even if the type of vehicles using the roads is restricted, it is not always possible to restrict their number.

What will happen now is that a series of consultation workshops will be conducted between next month and June with a view to a final plan being drawn up for the planning committee to adopt in August. This means that all the work would be done after the buzz of the Festival has died down. It is recognised that this is an iconic street and the council are determined to split the work up into manageable chunks, not only for ease of execution, but also to learn by doing so what will work on this street where people work, live and walk.

