

City Centre Vision to become reality



Following the success of pedestrianising parts of George Street during the Festival, the council is now set to trial a one way system there for a year following the decision of the Transport & Environment Committee this morning.

Andy Neal, CEO of Essential Edinburgh said:-" Essential Edinburgh carried out a full review of visitors and residents after the Festival period and everyone agreed that what was done in George Street this year was a success. There is further learning to be done however and we continue to look at the arrangements."

Mr Neal kindly agreed to meet with us prior to the meeting to give us his reasons for supporting the council's plans.

There is to be a two way cycle route along the middle which will actually form part of the National Cycle Network, and buses will continue to use Princes Street as before. Cycle parking is to be increased and key city centre junctions are to be retimed to increase the pedestrian priority.

The administration made the suggestion of a trial for 12 months which will allow them to monitor all traffic movements in the area. Councillor Aldridge asked about cyclists on Princes Street and was told that they can still use Princes Street if they wish, but the national cycle route and thus the preferred route will be George Street. Councillor Aldridge also asked about low emission vehicles to be used by Lothian Buses, but admitted that the area around Princes Street was probably not the worst in terms of air quality.

Councillor Cardownie, the Festivals Champion asked again about George Street when he said:-" Is there anything in the proposals which is an obstacle to Festival arrangements being replicated next year?" The council officer replied that traffic management would be required but did not see an obstacle. The convenor explained that the festival arrangements are due to be reported on at the next meeting in January.

The Conservatives suggested a motion which included a suggestion that bus services would be continued for 12 months in both directions to allow the effects of the tram service to be assessed.

Councillor Hinds said that she wants the city centre to be comfortable for everyone, whether pedestrian, cyclist or driver. The essential thing is to make it an attractive place for people to come to. She mentioned comparisons with Times Square in New York where the ideas were first trialled. "We want to be able to travel around the city centre more easily no matter what our mode of transport. We have a long term commitment about making the city centre better and more vibrant for everyone."

Conservative Councillor Joanna Mowat agreed that their aspirations were the same, but the two political groups had a different approach. She said:-"We are trying to meddle with situations which are currently unknown. We cannot know the baseline until the tram is up and running. This would then allow us to decide what needs to be altered. At present, we cannot know what the city centre will look like next year until the trams start running. We want to establish a robust baseline before making changes. We cannot disagree with the vision but we disagree with the way it is being done. People are not impressed by either George Street or Princes Street at the moment, but we want to make any changes properly. We will have no way to measure the success of these steps unless we know what we start from."

Councillor Aldridge supported the coalition motion in saying:- "Where we can anticipate the position, we should make the change."

The Green Group also supported the administration motion which Councillor Booth said was a real vision and showed that the council had listened to the results of the consultation.

This plan started during the last administration when the LibDem/SNP coalition instructed a report by Gehl architects. In March 2013 the Transport committee agreed that to improve pedestrian space in the city centre would take some reorganising of the traffic arrangements, and that to start with the emphasis should be on Princes Street and George Street with other programmes such as the Leith Programme, Waverley Bridge and the Royal Mile to follow closely behind, as well as the public realm improvements expected at Charlotte Square.

Consultation events took place earlier this year, and a petition was made to the council's Petitions Committee demanding that Princes Street be made free of all motor traffic, which would more closely follow the vision of the Gehl Report.

Buses will continue along Princes Street in both directions for the 12 month trial period to allow assessment of the tram service, and the council will work with all main bus operators to review frequency of other bus services with a view to reducing the number of buses which cross the city centre.

The idea is to make Edinburgh more continental with on street cafes, and more flexible space, but also to encourage property owners in Princes Street to develop their upper floors. The city centre is also to be decluttered with unnecessary street furniture being removed. Please tell us if you see any that needs to be dealt with!

The move to introduce temporary one way systems in George

Street will require only a temporary Traffic Restriction Order which is also easier to manage from an administrative point of view.

The whole report is reproduced for you here:-

http://www.theedinburghreporter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Item_7.1__Building_a_Vision_for_the_City_Centre.pdf