

Melville Street 'reimagining'

Whether or not you live and work in the West End it is likely that you occasionally pass through this area on a bike, in a car and sometimes on foot. It is a busy thoroughfare and an area for car parking especially during the week.

At the moment Melville Crescent, halfway along Melville Street, is a vast area given over largely to traffic, and offering little comfort to pedestrians who have a huge distance to cross, sometimes between vehicles.



Is there any difference in the new designs which have now been whittled down to a possible three out of an initial thirteen and which were displayed at a public engagement event on Saturday?

A stated aim of the 'reimagining' is to 'improve the public realm and increase opportunities for recreation'. Largely what is envisaged in the three designs we saw is more room for cars, some room for segregated cycle lanes, and a little room for some green space with some places to sit.

Another aim is to 'make a place that contributes to the quality of life for all sections of the local community'.



One of the first plans for the area when Melville Street was first built incorporated a garden around the centre where the statue now stands.

Option F which appears to have been discounted now, would make an open space around the centre of the street, creating a 'roundabout' for road users and an inviting space both day and night. It could be an open civic space with public realm rather than a cordoned off garden, and might be an attractive

space for office workers and residents to enjoy the outdoors.

The options for street furniture which were on display were all quite attractive and would very much improve the space, turning it into a public area. Some raised planters had integrated seats and would offer some greenery in the street.



It is a welcome thought that the council is considering options about what they can do to improve the area, and some of this is bound up with the proposed City Centre West to East Cycle Link (CCWEL).

This new route will take cyclists along a route designed for the less confident, and aims to segregate them from traffic wherever possible. Given that the speed limit is now 20mph, traffic will have to be made to slow down on a wide street which only invites higher speeds.

Part of the design for all three options on display on Saturday was a raised table which it was claimed would reduce vehicle speeds.

Outline plans for the new cycle route were approved in December 2016 and although the council website claims that the detailed design would take place in early 2017, there is little sign of a complete layout as yet, but we concede that this consultation is part of that process.

There are those who think that on street parking is a key consideration. Conservative Councillor Joanna Mowat said :
“The work to make a feature out of Melville Crescent as part of the city centre east west link (CCEWL) is an opportunity to create a new space for the communities of the West End – for both residents and workers.

“It is important to remember that the area is home to both

residents and businesses and that their needs must not be subsumed to those passing through. This means that parking must be accommodated throughout the wider CCEWL plans.”

Sustrans applauded the new cycle route in December last year. They said : “We are keen to support the City of Edinburgh Council in a project which, when implemented, should provide major benefits for Edinburgh as a whole, and bring renewed vibrancy to neighbourhoods along the route. We believe this project would be a strong contender for the competitive grant funding round as part of the Community Links funding programme. Indeed, we view this project as a step change for the City of Edinburgh – one that acknowledges and emphasises the substantial benefits the scheme can bring to the city via efficient, healthy, active, transport.”

Cllr Karen Doran, Transport Vice Convener and City Centre Ward councillor, said: “At the public exhibition at the weekend it was great to see how many people had come along to share their thoughts and ideas on how we can reimagine Melville Crescent. This will form a key part of the new City Centre West to East Link, which will help make it far easier to walk and cycle into and across Edinburgh’s city centre. Look out for our public consultation opening on the [Consultations Hub](#) very soon – tell us your views and help us make Melville Crescent as people-friendly as possible for future generations to enjoy.”



SOMETHING NEW

Whilst reading around this story, we discovered something new to us.

Apparently Edinburgh has a [Public Realm Strategy](#). Who knew? We knew that GEHL Architects were engaged at some expense a while back to talk about pavement cafés on Princes Street, but we were blissfully unaware of any overall strategy affecting the city – till now. Helpfully there is a definition.

Public Realm is defined as “Those parts of the city where people can gain unrestricted access for the purpose of passing through, meeting, visiting and enjoying. It is where we come together as a community not merely a place for functional movement.”

Anyway a swift search on the council website and sure enough we do have a [policy document](#) dating from December 2009. Proclaiming grandly that “The public realm acts as a stage upon which the life of the city is played out. It is the glue that binds together the city’s diverse areas.” this document aims to give a kind of coordination to any future developments.

This is a 20 page document worth reading. It is perhaps worth reminding the council from time to time of the existence of such a document especially when it decides to do things which directly affect the public realm.

The strategic vision alone states : “Edinburgh recognises the the public realm forms an integral part of the public face of the city. Edinburgh will develop and maintain a high quality public realm to complement the outstanding built and natural qualities of this unique capital city.”

You can keep up to date with developments at Melville Crescent on the council’s consultation hub [here](#).