

Picardy Place – going round in circles?

The trouble with public meetings is that everybody starts from a different place. At last night's meeting of the New Town and Broughton Community Council it was no different. There were nigh on 60 people plus a dozen or so community councillors in a hot and sweaty room at Broughton St Mary's with a couple of major developments on the agenda.

One of these was the possible realignment of the traffic at Picardy Place.



The Director of Place, Paul Lawrence, a council official, attended the meeting to try and explain the current position. He was accompanied by a member of the council's Communications team and also Alasdair Sim of Sweco, an engineering, environment and design consultancy. Mr Sim is now a technical director, but he used to work on trams when employed at the council, so travel and traffic management is very much his area of expertise.

Mr Sim explained the practical effects of the possible rearrangement of the roadways in this area at length to the assembled councillors and members of the public at some length.

Mr Lawrence explained the council's position as one party to a legally binding contract, whereas the members of the community council and the members of the public who were there only want a roundabout that is better than the present one. And they all had different views.

The council facilitated the Edinburgh St James development by introducing the Growth Accelerator Model of funding. The GAM

is a three party contract and is legally binding. (Read more about the GAM below)

The meeting listened intently to what Mr Lawrence had to say.



Information and the communication of it is usually the key to getting two sides together. And there was criticism of a lack of tangible information from the council both last night and in recent months.

The council was criticised for not putting anything in writing about the way the Picardy Place roundabout design had come about. There has been one public consultation exercise on 22 September 2017 at Valvona & Crolla VinCaffee on Multrees Walk.

One community councillor said there was little notice given of that event. When asked about future consultation dates, Mr Lawrence was unable to confirm those as yet, although a commitment was made last Thursday that there will be more consultation.

Another member of the public asked that any future consultation events are held locally. The council appear to be considering holding such events at the City Chambers which was felt to be too far away and inappropriate.

A suggestion from the floor was that the pavement outside the Cathedral is made wider than appears to be proposed given its role in the community. Questions as to what the Cathedral think remain unanswered.

Comments about the possibility of tunnels or bridges under the roundabout were met with a degree of scepticism.

But the [Transport Committee](#) agreed last week that they would consult further on possible changes which can be made. It was made clear during the committee meeting last Thursday that in order to keep within the terms of the tripartite contract

they cannot make **many** changes. Some at last night's community council meeting did not understand that it seems.

It was mentioned during the lengthy discussion that if one party (for example the council) unilaterally tries to change the terms of the GAM, then it might lay them open to being sued by the others. This was mentioned at the Transport Committee last week, and it is clear that the consequences could be serious. The sum of £60 million is at stake, and there is always the possibility of the council incurring further costs in relation to the tram extension as a result of any breach in the contract.

Mr Lawrence was keen to explain that the GAM and the tram extension are not in fact connected. The GAM is only related to the roads and traffic management envisaged when it was entered into. (Read a fuller explanation of the GAM below.)

The council officer echoed what he said at last week's Transport and Environment Committee meeting when he said this is an 'optimal scheme' and perhaps not the perfect one. Some of the difficulties which people have with this layout are aired [here in our earlier article.](#)

The drawing brought to the meeting (shown above) bears just a little resemblance to the one on the GAM contract which was shown to the Transport and Environment Committee last week.



Another member of the public accused the council of having a wider, somehow secret, plan to change the layout of the city centre, explaining that there are proposals for Hanover Street and Frederick Street that would affect the East End too.

Picardy Place plans may be far from perfect, but if the tram extension (or completion of route 1A) proceeds next year at this time when the council vote on it, then the tram stop at York Place will move to Picardy Place. This will make it into

a transport hub or interchange.

When the tram line was being built it was initially going to stop at St Andrew Square. Then, without too much discussion, there was suddenly talk of it going all the way to York Place and that was what eventually happened. It was clear that this was a kind of 'future proofing', and indeed the possibility of a tram stop or traffic interchange at Picardy Place in this design protects the future position too.

The new tram stop will only be put in place if the tram extension proceeds. (Yes you might understand that, but others muttering around and about me last night did not seem to grasp the fundamental point that to put a tram stop in Picardy Place you need to first of all extend the line. To extend the line..... you get my point.)

Chair of New Town and Broughton Community Council Ian Mowat said : "It was a robust debate and although residents did not get the commitments to rethink the scheme many wanted, I took from the council official's responses that real change might yet be made if the community pushed hard enough for it."

Conservative Councillor Joanna Mowat echoed her party's line when she suggested that the whole scheme should be shelved until next year when the decision on the tram extension is made. The Conservative Group is firmly against the tram extension and constantly ask for delays usually because of the ongoing Tram Inquiry.

Then there is the so-called Development Site in the middle of the Picardy Place area. Until The Edinburgh Reporter asked the question there was no mention of the fact that this land is at least in part Common Good Land. This means that the council would need a court decree to be able to sell it. But this is not really the decision on the table right now.

It is probable that there will be a decision made on any changes to the Picardy Place design at the Transport Committee meeting in December. But meantime we expect many people to have their say. If you would like to have yours, then do add a comment below.



St Mary's Broughton where the meeting was held

So are there any facts we learned from last night's meeting?

The council continues to promote the use of public transport and active travel in the city as stated in its [Active Travel Plan](#)

This latest design would keep traffic moving north to south and the council believes it improves public transport options.

A tram is 43 metres long and the tram stop or interchange needs to be 70 metres long. It is probable that the tram stop would be formed on the north side of the triangle for that reason.

Traffic would be regulated around the three sides by traffic signals, and the hope is that traffic would pass around Picardy Place almost without a stop.

A new bus stop may be formed outside the Cathedral rather than on York Place for westbound traffic.

Mr Lawrence denied that Sustrans had 'walked out of the discussions' on Picardy Place as reported by other media. He said that the design Sustrans proposed was not workable. But he said that the council and Sustrans continue to have good

relations evidenced by the new schemes announced for Edinburgh just the other week.

(Sustrans issued a written statement on their website [here](#). They believe that the proposal does not follow Scottish Government policy for Designing Streets. They also consider that the multi-lane gyrator is unsuitable for a gateway to Edinburgh's World Heritage area. Finally they believe this plan is driven by traffic modelling and that the cycling infrastructure is not a good design. Some of those at the meeting appeared to have read this as there were constant refrains of "Driven by transport options" during the meeting.)

The decision on the future design of the roundabout has been delayed by the Transport Convener Councillor Macinnes who decided not to take a decision on it last week. Instead she asked council officers to conduct more consultation in the next month and a half, and give the Transport Committee a full written report for 7 December 2017.

Mr Lawrence confirmed that options for the so-called Development Site (the area in the middle) will be a part of that written report. It will also record the full history of the site.

The council's view is that it would be advantageous to carry out work on the roundabout now while Leith Street is closed for 44 weeks, after which we were reminded all current diversions will be reversed. It would minimise disruption.

If there is a tram extension then the plan is for the London Road junction to be controlled by traffic lights. (it appeared to us that it would be a junction rather than a roundabout in future)

The council has consulted with Edinburgh Access Panel about the way those with disabilities will access this area.

EXPLAINER

Growth Accelerator Model GAM

At the moment the council is in a binding agreement with The Scottish Government and the developer of Edinburgh St James, all as agreed and overseen by the Scottish Futures Trust. This tripartite agreement is called the Growth Accelerator Model and is the way parts of the development of the £1 billion scheme is being paid for. It is the first of its kind, although is now being used elsewhere in Scotland, namely in Dundee.

In short it is a funding mechanism to help attract private sector investment but which pays for infrastructure that the public will benefit from. In the case of Edinburgh St James, the council wanted to update the area, the owners Henderson wanted to update the St James Shopping Centre but there was a £60million financial hole. The [Growth Accelerator Model](#) (originally called the Regeneration Accelerator Model) unlocked the capital needed to make Edinburgh St James a reality with all the city centre improvements to public realm, roads and traffic management, a new energy centre and upgraded utilities. (There is a huge new sewer going in at the top of Leith Street which is why it is closed.)

The council could not afford to pay for the works to the surrounding area and this had stalled any development in the area for years. The Scottish Office had decanted leaving one of the blocks an empty shell for a long time.

The council proposed the case that if the scheme was somehow financed then they would get more in the way of income as rates and council tax receipts would increase. More than that,

the scheme itself would impact on the local economy and create around 2,500 jobs in the long term along with short term construction jobs. Based on the numbers which the council put forward : increases in rateable values both in the development and across Edinburgh, with more jobs and training in deprived areas of the city, The Scottish Government provided grant funding to the council.