

Picardy Place Consultation – public events today and tomorrow

The story of the Picardy Place roundabout is told in sequential form at the public consultation event taking place at the City Art Centre today using a range of maps of this area which has historically been a traffic bottleneck.

Now that the council has listened to the public outcry in the last couple of months, they are laying out the proposed design in the knowledge that there will be traffic, but in the hope that they can minimise congestion and make the area friendlier for pedestrians and cyclists.

The Leith Programme has been on the go for a number of years, as you can see by looking at the new road surface and cycle lanes introduced at the bottom of Leith Walk. It was never going to be completed until the Picardy Place/ Edinburgh St James development was at least underway as it now is.

The council has a new post-September 2017 proposal which is fully funded by the Growth Accelerator Model (GAM) by which the Edinburgh St James project was allowed to proceed. This involves a funding arrangement among the council, the developer and the Scottish Government.

The revised proposals are also [available to view on the Council's Consultation Hub](#) , where members of the public will be able to have their say until 15 December.

Prior to this the Picardy Place area which needed so much improvement was unfunded. Council transport officials have in the last month gone back to the drawing board along with the Edinburgh St James developers to find ways of improving upon the traffic scheme while managing to retain the GAM in place.

Jointly the working group came up with about 20 improvements of which a dozen are left in the narrative on the newly released plan.

Work will be carried out on Picardy Place and Leith Street and will be paid for by the GAM, but how it will look is still not quite finalised.

The consultation is open till 15 December 2017 following which council officers will further refine the plans along with the Edinburgh St James developers. These plans will be submitted to a special Transport Committee meeting on 25 January 2018 for approval.

Work is being carried out on the top of Leith Street at the moment and the council want to implement other works on Picardy Place while there is less traffic in the area. Transport officials are really keen to do this work while disruption to the city would be kept to a minimum. Currently traffic is rerouted by London Road and Montrose Terrace while the top of Leith Street is closed for major sewer works for 10 months. The current Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) determines that all of these diversions and the Leith Street closure will be reversed and the road layout will return to how it used to be when the TRO ends in early summer 2018.

Whether that will be changed in the future owing to the ongoing conversation about the city centre remains to be seen, but it may be for example that the top of Leith Street is converted to a Public transport route and the current diversions would then be put back in place. Given that any TRO takes about a year to come into effect any possibility of such a scheme is a long way off, if indeed there is an appetite for it.

There is one plan from 2012 showing what might have happened if the Tram Project had been concluded as previously planned. It was very much tram first, with three lanes of traffic and

did not show much consideration for pedestrians and cyclists.

Previous plans to put a hotel in the triangular area in the middle were shelved long ago, but there is still a possibility of the area being used for shops and a type of civic square. The sketches shown to stakeholders yesterday show shops around the edges in a solid development. It has to be emphasised that this is still under discussion between the council and Hendersons who are the developer.

A previous proposal for a Y junction tried to cater first for pedestrians and facilitated segregated cycle lanes and a multi modal exchange (which means trams and buses) while not creating a roundabout or gyratory. So coming from Broughton Street you would have gone left and then right much as you do now to get to Leith Street. But coming from Leith Street you would go further down the street past a peninsula outside John Lewis and the Cathedral before turning left and then right to Broughton Street.

There are about 3,000 buses converging on this area each day perhaps better demonstrated as the number of people who pass through : an alarming 100,000! This opportunity for passengers to step off one form of transport and join another is considered crucial and one which should not be missed.

Some buses could stop at this major interchange and turn around to go back on their same route. This could only be implemented after further discussion but it would go some way to freeing up Princes Street.

Transport officers have some modelling on display which shows that traffic queues are minimised by putting in a roundabout rather than a Y junction and it is hoped that this modelling video may become available online later in the week.

The council insists that it is trying hard to minimise congestion but at the same time providing only for as much traffic as there is at present and not actively encouraging

more traffic to the area.

The design produced in September 2017 had many of the elements of all the various designs. It has the tram stop to the north, three lanes of traffic. The biggest criticism made about this design was the amount of space outside the cathedral which had been reduced to a minimum of 5.8 metres in width. When locals discovered that this would prevent the Paolozzi sculptures being returned to there was a lot of adverse comment.

There was also concern around the shared crossing points, (meaning those shared between cyclists and pedestrians) and the loss of trees in the area. The council counters the argument about trees by explaining that for every tree that is felled it will be replaced by two others. The problem is that the new trees may not be planted in the same locale; they will perhaps have to be planted elsewhere in the city.

Other criticism centred on the amount of space on the carriageway, as well as the basic criticism that this layout would create a gyratory.



Finally the revised plan which we show here is the result of discussions between council officers and the developer's designers who came up with many thoughts on improvements. The dozen changes which they now propose are all shown marked on the plan. The key features are the increased space outside the cathedral which has been increased from 5.8 metres to about 15 metres. This has enabled the council to reintroduce trees here and reinstate the Paolozzi sculptures.

The footways are wider and carriageways narrower as a result of public opinion offered up till now, including a piece of pavement at Union Place which will be widened.

There is a new cycle way which would allow those travelling from Broughton Street to Leith Walk to do so without going

round the roundabout at all. Instead they will use a cycle path traversing the space in front of the cathedral and then rejoin the roadway on Leith Street.

All trees in the area will have to be removed but the council will undertake a 2 for 1 replacement programme.

The public events take place today and tomorrow but the public consultation will run until 15 December so you have plenty of time to have your say. The various plans and possibly also the traffic modelling video will be available on the consultation hub.

Then there will be a special meeting of the Transport and Environment committee on 25 January council hopes to get an approved design which it can then start work on.

Any small changes which are incorporated as a result of the consultation will not necessarily need to have the approval of the developers of Edinburgh St James. What the council cannot do without some danger of putting the £61 million GAM at risk is make any major changes to the design.



Transport and Environment Convener, Councillor Lesley Macinnes photographed above with John Lauder of Sustrans, said: “Having allowed more time for public engagement, I am pleased that we have been able to accommodate further design changes based on the valuable feedback received to date.

“The desire for more public space, in particular, has come across loud and clear and the latest designs clearly reflect this.

“Of course, there is still more time for people to have their say and I would encourage everyone with an interest in the proposals to either attend one of the events or have their say online.

“Comments and ideas gathered will help us to create a final design that best meets the needs of all, benefiting pedestrians and cyclists while enabling the smooth flow of public transport to and from the city.

“We have demonstrated through this process a willingness to listen and to take new ideas on board where possible and we will do so again.”

Spokes the Lothian cycle campaign group have this to say :

