

Accessible Streets in Edinburgh Welcomed by Equalities Groups

The City of Edinburgh Council's citywide ban on 'A' boards and other temporary on-street advertising has been deemed a success, one year on from its introduction.

The 12-month review of the ban, which will be reported to the Council's Transport and Environment Committee on Thursday (5 December), acknowledges its impact on reducing street clutter, improving accessibility and enhancing the environment, particularly on some of the city's most historic streets.

Positive feedback has been received from a variety of stakeholders including equalities groups, community councils and heritage organisations, with compliance amongst businesses estimated at more than 90%.

It is now recommended that the ban remains in place following the review period, though the Council will continue to work with businesses to explore alternative advertising options.

Transport and Environment Convener Councillor Lesley Macinnes said: "The main aim of the ban on temporary on-street advertising was to improve the accessibility and safety of our streets, so I'm delighted that it's had such a positive impact for pedestrians.

"The difference is visible in streets around Edinburgh and it's thanks to businesses across the city for complying with the new rules that we've been able to achieve this. We will continue to work with traders to explore alternative ways of promoting their businesses while adhering to the ban."

The review recognises concerns from businesses, particularly those in closes and in basements, as well as walking tour operators, around the loss of advertising. The Council has therefore committed to providing continued support, including a dedicated webpage which sets out useful links to guidance and advice.



12 months on, the Council's decision is proving popular. (Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com)

Since the introduction of the ban, 222 businesses have been instructed to remove advertising structures, with the vast majority – 193 – complying immediately. Of the 29 formal notices subsequently issued to non-compliant businesses, only 14 structures had to be confiscated.

Organisations with an equality focus such as RNIB, Living Streets and the Edinburgh Access Panel, along with community councils, have given positive feedback about the difference the ban has made to the accessibility and safety of streets for everyone, not just those with disabilities.

Heritage groups, including Edinburgh World Heritage and the Cockburn Association, have welcomed the ban's effect on the appearance of the World Heritage Site and on the reduction of impediments to pedestrians' movement, while business organisations Essential Edinburgh and the Chamber of Commerce have stressed the need for consistent enforcement.

The report also addresses issues raised around Edinburgh Fringe advertising, which is exempt from the ban solely to allow official, event-related advertising to be displayed, limiting the occurrence of fly-posting.

The Council's festival advertising partner Out of Hand Ltd has agreed a number of recommendations to further reduce the impact on pedestrian accessibility and safety, such as designing slimmer lamppost wraps and reducing the number of crowd barriers.

Read the full report, Citywide Ban on 'A' Boards and Other Temporary On-street Advertising Structures – 12 Month Review, on the Council website.

Supportive comments

James Adams, Director of the national sight loss charity RNIB Scotland, said: "A third of people that RNIB surveyed previously said they had been injured by pavement obstacles. The ban on temporary on-street advertising by City of Edinburgh Council has made our capital a safer and more welcoming environment for blind and partially sighted residents and visitors, and for others with disabilities.

"A vital element for any successful 21st Century city must be inclusivity; a city that is open and welcoming to everyone, no matter what needs or disabilities they have. By introducing a ban on on-street advertising, Edinburgh Council has embraced inclusivity and accessibility. We thank the councillors and officials for making this happen and urge that the ban continue."

Robin Wickes, Vice Chairman of the Edinburgh Access Panel, said: "Pavement clutter has always been a major obstacle for disabled pedestrians, especially when the pavements are as busy and narrow as many of Edinburgh's tend to be. Edinburgh Access Panel was delighted when the A-board ban was announced and we're now happy to report that the ban has made a real difference.

"It's much easier and safer for disabled pedestrians to navigate our streets, particularly for wheelchair users and those with a vision impairment. There's still room for improvement of course – notably by addressing clutter caused by obstacles like rubbish bins and rental bikes. But the ban on A-boards has been a major step forward in making our pavements safer and more accessible."

David Hunter of the Living Streets Edinburgh Group, which campaigns for everyday walking, said: "'A-board' clutter had become a significant problem on many Edinburgh streets, especially because so many pavements aren't wide enough. The ban has made it easier, safer and more enjoyable to walk in many local streets across the city."