

Low Traffic Neighbourhood in East Craigs paused for consideration of legal advice

The proposed Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) in East Craigs has provoked more words, spoken and written, much in the way of opposition whether from local councillors or residents than just about any other proposal possibly since the tram project.

The proposal was made by the council using some of the £5 million Spaces for People funding from The Scottish Government under emergency Covid-19 legislation. This legislation does not formally require any consultation with residents, although the council has allowed five days of consultation with local bodies such as community councils, but it does not allow for lengthy, sometimes years' long consultation that usually happens.

At first glance, it looks like a light touch measure, by stopping up some exits and entries onto Maybury Road and Drumbrae, and introducing a bus gate. The idea of an [LTN](#) is to stop drivers from outside the area using the roads there, such as Craigs Road which runs east to west. The residents say there is no need for such draconian measures, and that there is no rat-running to be stopped.



Craigmount High School on Craigs Road. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com

Today, the matter had been referred from the Transport and Environment Committee (TEC), at first for approval by full council. In light of a last minute deputation made to TEC on 6 October 2020 (which included an abridged version of a legal opinion obtained by one of the objectors to the scheme saying the proposal was probably unlawful) the coalition today proposed delaying any decision. This, they suggested, would allow council officers to provide a summary of the council's own legal advice for the next TEC meeting on 12 November 2020. They said they were ready to make any further revisions to the designs resulting from such legal advice too.

In the first place, the council agreed on 14 May to take steps under Covid-19 emergency legislation to 'close selected roads to enable local trips to be made safely, especially to parks etc and schools, in the East Craigs area'.

There has since been a great deal of discussion, but mainly there has been opposition from local residents who signed a petition, who attended an open air meeting in late August which the Transport Convener, Cllr Macinnes, attended, and who have penned lengthy written [deputations](#) to TEC and today's council meeting.

Since then the Transport Convener agreed to scrutiny of the planned measures by councillors (although in the initial legislation that is not required either). The matter was referred to TEC on 1 October when councillors approved the Low Traffic Neighbourhood, but Conservative Transport spokesperson Cllr Susan Webber then demanded that the matter was referred to full council for approval by all 62 councillors. She attained sufficient support from other councillors on the committee for that. Now that the matter has come to the full council meeting, and has been discussed again, it is now delayed until the middle of November for more discussion.



Craigs Road. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

This matter has now become mired in council process. That was not the original aim of the Spaces for People funding, but it appears, in part, to be a reaction to the level of public opposition. The opposition is well organised, as well as self-funded, and has involved many individual emails to most of the councillors.

It is of course democracy in action, but it is worth saying that the council sent flyers about the LTN to around 4,700 households in the area at the beginning of the process. Even if some 2,600 people signed the petition opposing the measures, that is not a majority of people who live there.

Some of the councillors who spoke at the council meeting today (and the debate went on for well over an hour) said they had also been contacted by people who welcomed the measures.

Local councillors Mark Brown and Robert Aldridge want the council to 'halt and consult'. Cllr Aldridge suggested the council works with the community to draw up proposals to create a safe, clean, environmentally friendly neighbourhood. Cllr Kevin Lang said that the way the council has dealt with this is a mess. He said it is little wonder the community has unquestionably lost any confidence in this process. He pointed out that officer time is being 'sucked up' into this while simple changes could be made which communities want. He also pointed out that in the four months since this proposal was made, a consultation could have been held.

Cllr Iain Whyte said that not every councillor has had sight of the legal advice to the council, and Cllr Claire Miller said that the council has to be certain of the legal position before moving on. Cllr Chas Booth expressed the view that he believes the council should aim for a child friendly city, and in an aside said that Leith which he represents will welcome any proposed LTN there. Cllr Jim Campbell agreed that children

should be encouraged to use active travel to get to school, and would like the council to concentrate on school routes rather than this LTN.

Cllr Laidlaw suggested there must be other proposals across the city which people do want.

Finally perhaps Cllr Graham Hutchison summed up a lot of the opposition parties' contributions when he said: "We should have been discussing the merits of the plans and instead we are left to discuss the appalling anti-democratic way this has been dealt with by the councillors."

This will probably not be the last word on the matter which may be discussed by the Transport and Environment Committee when it next meets on 12 November 2020, unless any other council procedure gets in the way first.



East Craigs area PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter