

George Street to become a New Town boulevard

By 2025 George Street will be a wide boulevard with six and a half metre wide adaptable paved areas for people walking and wheeling, playing and lingering to enjoy.

There will be landscaped seating areas offering a calm restful space, and café culture will be central to the rejuvenation of the city centre. The project is part of the council drive to become a net zero carbon city within the decade.

This £32 million project has been a long time in development. It will be partly paid for with £20 million from Transport Scotland through Sustrans and councillors will have to approve the balance of funding later this year. City centre councillor Karen Doran reflected that the council has talked about it since 2012. There have been some speed bumps along the way, with the year long experimental phase with outdoor dining areas. Those of you with long memories may remember the white tents outside restaurants which were not exactly a success.

In the post-Covid era however outdoor spaces and outdoor dining will be much more important even in the Scottish climate. So this is a plan which appears to be happening at the right time. This will be a major improvement and will join the new St James Quarter to the Johnnie Walker attraction at the West End, and Edinburgh Castle as the third part of the triangle.

The street will be decluttered and spacious with people first

and will be almost traffic free. The simple lines of the original James Craig design will be copied and the statues at each junction along with key buildings along the street will have space to be admired.

it is about much more than sitting outside with a beer and steak pie however, this is a plan which will enable the city centre to become largely car free. It is a long time aim of the Transport Convener, Cllr Lesley Macinnes who described the current status of the street as a "car park". The only traffic allowed will be blue badge holders, and also delivery vehicles at set times.

Cllr Macinnes said: "These animated concept designs offer an exciting glimpse into what George Street and the surrounding area could look like in 2025 – a welcoming, relaxing and unique space, where people will want to spend time, to visit local shops, cafes and restaurants and to travel to and through the city centre.

"This vision has been years in the making and follows significant engagement with the public and a range of groups representing different interests. It's essential that its design works for everyone, which is why we've spent time ensuring it meets people's access needs, that it allows residents to go about their daily lives and that it will encourage local businesses to flourish, particularly as we look to make a strong, green recovery from the Covid crisis."







Transport and Environment Vice Convener Councillor Karen Doran said: “I was thrilled to see the concept designs for this project brought to life and look forward to hearing the responses of all those who watch our video or see the beautiful, detailed illustrations.

“This initiative offers the opportunity to transform one of Edinburgh’s iconic streets for the better, creating an accessible, inviting space, where both the historic environment is protected and biodiversity promoted, and where

people can relax and spend time on foot, bike or wheelchair.”

Cllr Claire Miller Transport spokesperson for the Green group said: “George Street has so much potential to be a fantastic city centre place, so I’m looking forward to hearing all the consultation responses and taking this project to the next stage.”

Cllrs Sue Webber Transport Spokesperson for the Conservative Group and Cllr Joanna Mowat who represents the City Centre said: “We were disappointed in what officers themselves described in our briefing as “surface dressing”.

“The ambition and original intentions of these project appear to have been somewhat set aside. Any changes to George Street are always going to be controversial and part of the difficulty is trying to make it work for all the different users of the street.

“It’s really important now that all the different users take part in the consultation so we can design out conflicts and ensure that the street works in the short term and long term. We are concerned that the current design doesn’t allow larger events to be placed in the street which is important to protect our green spaces and build on the testing that has previously been done.”

The consultation for the George Street and First New Town proposal will run throughout March beginning on Thursday and meantime there is a lot more information about the project [here](#).

The website has fly-throughs and all sorts of interactive

delights for you to try out.

This is stage two of a six-step process which allows time for the possibility of a public hearing.

The concept design is an amazing transformation of a street which is central to the World Heritage Site and is a central first pillar in the City Centre Transformation project which includes pedestrianisation of other thoroughfares in the city such as Waverley Bridge and Victoria Street. These are now closed by Covid-19 emergency legislation in the Spaces for People scheme, but for the moment until the council takes any further steps, these are not permanent closures.

Richard Grant, from Lothians cycle campaign, SPOKES, said: "George Street forms a crucial section of the Council's flagship west-east 'CCWEL' cyclerooute project, as well as being a major destination in its own right. The new George Street plans, taking lessons from European "cycle streets" provide a wide central "cycling zone" shared with blue badge and (at restricted times) delivery vehicles treated as 'guests'. This replaces the previously planned segregated bidirectional cyclerooute.

"This will be an innovative scheme for Scotland, which could be widely followed, and as such the Council must get it right. Given the funding from Sustrans, safe and pleasant conditions for cycling and walking are critical. Spokes welcomes the scheme subject to strict enforcement of the limited number and timings of permitted vehicles, as well as design details. We particularly welcome the assurance of enforcement, by automated means such as number plate recognition or in other ways, which is essential to success."



Living Streets Edinburgh

“Edinburgh – perhaps uniquely for a European city of its size and history – lacks any significant space in the city centre where pedestrians really come first. George Street has been dominated by traffic and parking for too long and is the obvious place to put this right in the heart of the New Town. These proposals offer the prospect of George Street becoming a place where it is finally a pleasure to walk in and linger.”

George St Association

“There is no doubt that the current pre-occupation of George Street Association members is how to recover when the prolonged coronavirus restrictions are lifted. However, we have a mutual interest with the City Council and others involved in this ambitious project to deliver the high-quality changes needed for the future success of this iconic street.

“This overdue transformation to the appearance and operation

of George Street will impact on our members and affected businesses in the area will need support throughout the inevitable disruption involved.

“We appreciate the opportunity for ongoing engagement with the City Council on the final concept design and thereafter.”

Key considerations include:

Putting people first:

Increased pedestrian space; adaptable, landscaped areas with seating, space for play and opportunities for events; space for outdoor seating for cafes and restaurants; better lighting to animate the streets after dark; level access crossings at street junctions for unimpeded crossing; disabled parking bays on George Street and interconnected streets

Protecting heritage:

Retaining symmetry on George Street; removing unnecessary street clutter; removing parking to reduce the dominance of motor traffic; upgrading pavements with high quality materials

Enhancing the environment:

Suitably scaled soft landscaping including shrubs and hedging, reducing the impact of heavy rain and floods; permeably paved areas to allow drainage

Improved walking, cycling and wheeling connections:

Largely car-free; cycling is prioritised in George Street and directly connects with the Meadows to George Street and CCWEL cycle route schemes at Hanover Street, St Andrew Square and Charlotte Square; improved pedestrian crossings at junctions; loading retained for businesses

The Transport and Environment Committee will look at the plans in more detail in April when comments added to the

consultation will be considered in any further iteration of the proposal. After statutory processes it is hoped that construction will begin in 2023, and that the transformation will be complete by 2025.

<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/georgestreet/>

What do you think? Do let us know.

