

Visit to the Botanics made difficult by changes to disabled parking

A regular reader has been in touch about the reduction in disabled parking spaces near the entrance to the Botanics.

What he found on a recent visit – his first since lockdown began – was that disabled parking is no longer allowed in the semi circle at the John Hope Gateway. Our reader can only walk about 20 yards, and he found that he had to park a distance away from the entrance.

This meant that the mobility scooter brought to him by Botanics staff was wheeled down the centre of the road and so allowing him to open his driver's door and transfer across to the scooter.

As a result there was, he said, an added danger from passing drivers travelling at speed. There used to be room for fifteen cars and taxis at the gate – and now there are only six spaces. But the message from the council is that those holding a blue disabled badge can park anywhere on a single yellow line or in any pay and display space as well as nominated disabled spots, meaning that although there is no parking in the semicircle any longer there is a pick up/drop off and parking on the roadside.

The difficulty is that our reader was the driver, and not, perhaps as might have been envisaged, a passenger. Our reader said: "I can only walk a short distance. The set up for

parking as a driver is not what I am used to, and it is not what the Highway Code expects. I would still need a scooter to get around the Botanics and have to be able to access that. Getting out on the pavement side to transfer to a scooter would be difficult with those ramps.”

Our reader also persists that according to S239-247 of the Highway Code drivers are supposed to park with their passenger door towards pavement. The advice is not to park “facing against the traffic flow” and stop the vehicle as close as possible to the side of the road. The Highway Code also reminds drivers that it is safer for passengers to get out of the vehicle on the side next to the kerb.

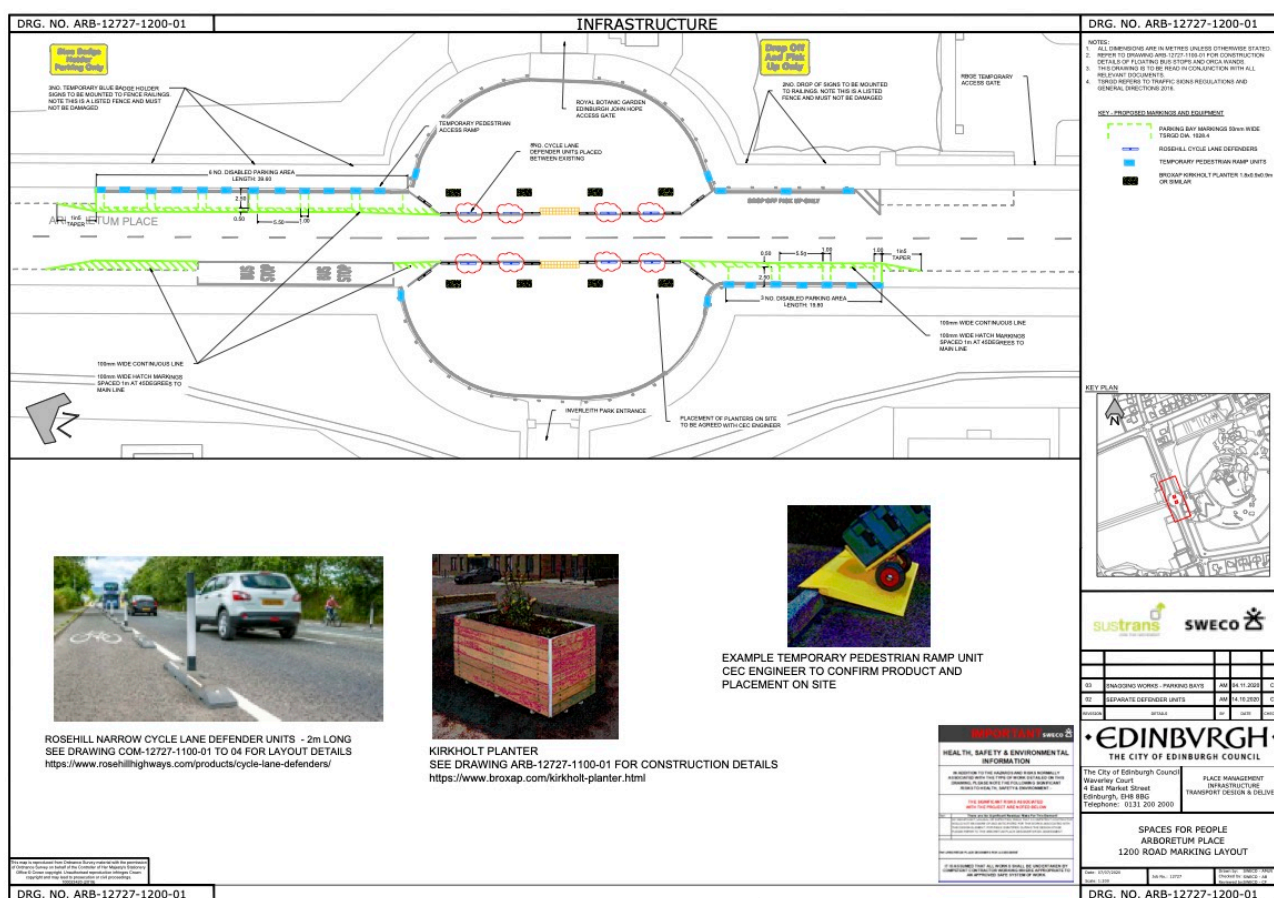
Simon Milne, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh said: “The Garden is a wonderful and welcoming space for everyone, so we do understand our visitors’ frustrations when it’s difficult to find a parking space on the public highway, particularly if they have mobility issues. We consult closely with The City of Edinburgh Council to ensure that disabled persons’ parking bays are clearly visible to users and support the council in their long-term plans to make the road outside the Garden safe, easy to cross and pedestrian friendly.

“I can confirm that there are six disabled persons’ parking spaces on Arboretum Place, just to the left of our main entrance gate, and three more spaces opposite the entrance beside the Inverleith Park gates.”

Spaces for People

The rearrangement at the Botanics was made under the Spaces for People measures introduced as a result of Covid-19. It was in July 2020 that local councillors were advised that the council planned to narrow the carriageway to six metres to form a pedestrian crossing from Inverleith Park, and were also told that it would be necessary to move the disabled spaces. A

build out was positioned at the pedestrian crossing with orca wand units and four planters and a drop-off, pick-up area was to be created.



Cllr Gavin Barrie, a member of the Edinburgh Party of Independent Councillors, said: "During the development of Spaces for People local councillors managed to secure much needed and sought-after speed reducing measures at the crossing between The Botanic and Inverleith Park. These measures, of assistance to all pedestrians, disabled or able bodied, meant that the semi-circle disabled parking had to be replaced with on street advisory disabled parking either side of the John Hope entrance.

"To make these permanent, will take a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) which can take up to eighteen months to implement. Spaces for People policy did not allow the finance for SfP to be used for a TRO. Whilst the permanent spaces were lost, a balance had to be struck with so many people using that crossing point, especially during the pandemic. It was felt

that given a blue badge holder can park not only in the designated Blue Badge spaces, but in any pay and display section, of which all of the streets around the Botanic Gardens are, there should be sufficient parking for those who need to park a vehicle before transferring to another mode of transport (if needed) to enjoy the wonderful Botanic Gardens.

“All the Ward Councillors have, for many years, sought a permanent solution for this crossing and disabled parking in that area, but this is one of many schemes in the Ward that are continually put on a back burner time and time again, in favour of other projects, much to the extreme frustration of us all.”

The council, though, do appear to have assumed that the disabled person is always a passenger. There are yellow ramps next to the disabled spaces to make it easier for someone with limited mobility alighting from a vehicle to get onto the pavement.

Inverleith councillor, Cllr Hal Osler, was very much involved in the design of the pedestrian crossing and the moving of the parking spaces. She said: “This was a real opportunity to do something to discourage speeding on this road. The difficulty was disabled access, but the spaces were however moved to a location right next to the semicircle. After the original design was agreed the Botanic Gardens had to move the entranceway to the side gate, the location of the disabled spaces remained the same to the left of the gate, but there was lots of work done to make it safer. We certainly did not want to disadvantage any individuals and I really want to know about it if this is causing a problem.”

Cllr Osler explained that as a result of the gully alongside the roadside and the slope on the road, yellow ramps were put in to aid people of limited mobility to get out of cars and these were all clearly marked. The image above shows the ramps which were going to be used, but these have been swapped for

metal ramps which are more robust and can withstand a heavier load.



Photo courtesy of Cllr Osler

The council held a consultation on the future of the Spaces for People measures introduced during the pandemic and will consider which of these will be retained when it meets on [14 October 2021](#). If measures are to be continued then the council will use the Traffic Regulation scheme as provide for in the road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. This involves consultation with statutory bodies such as the emergency services and advertising in terms of the legislation. A full list of the measures which are recommended for retention or alteration is attached to this report [here](#).

In June the council decided to use Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders for some schemes which help active travel. Although there was further discussion of schemes such as those at Braid Road and Silverknowes Road, the scheme at the Botanics was not raised at that time.

Cllr Max Mitchell who is one of the four councillors who represent the Inverleith Ward said: "This temporary scheme was installed to replicate the overdue permanent crossing between Inverleith Park and The Botanics. My Ward colleagues and I saw it as an opportunity to trial the project and understand possible implications before proceeding. The intention was always to improve public realm and pedestrian safety, and we were very mindful that if blue badge spaces were to be relocated then they had to be sited as close as possible. Metal ramps for level access, painting white markings to designate larger individual spaces, and signage were added to the new blue badge spaces.

"I have been supportive of this project, but I accept that there are clearly lessons to be learnt before implementing the permanent scheme especially if disabled people are feeling excluded or unsafe. I hope the Council will take this onboard before proceeding with the permanent scheme."



