

Road changes on Arboretum Place continue to make visits to The Botanic difficult for Hugh

Disabled motorist Hugh Munro staged a one man demonstration at the Botanic today to show the difficulties he has in exiting his car onto a scooter which he reserves at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE).

The difficulties were compounded by RBGE staff explaining today that they will not be able to bring the scooter out to him on the road in the future, as this would not be covered by their insurance. They were happy to oblige for the purposes of our photo call, but at any future visits the scooter will have to be picked up at the front desk which may be too far for Mr Munro to walk on his own.

The matter of the road layout is to be discussed at the Transport and Environment Committee meeting on Thursday as part of the Travelling Safely update (the follow up to the Spaces for People programme). So far the "crescents" on either side of the road at the entrances to The Botanic and Inverleith Park have been closed off to traffic except for drop offs and the road has been narrowed to loosely form a pedestrian crossing (although there are as yet no road

markings to create one).



Disabled rights campaigner Hugh Munro demonstrated his difficulty in getting into the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh to councillors at the West Gate PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

Local councillors Iain Whyte and Max Mitchell attended the photo call to see the arrangements for themselves. Cllr Whyte told The Edinburgh Reporter that he has been asked by residents for fifteen years for a crossing. He said: “Despite half a million pounds allocated in the council budgets, and a five year proposal, two designs and two public consultations and we still don’t have a pedestrian crossing here.”

Cllr Lezley Marion Cameron who is Chair of the Cross-Party on Equalities said: “The council should first of all always do equality impact assessments especially on transport adjustments or improvements, because we’re excluding such a large proportion of the population. It’s been good to see for myself what the process now involves. I do think the disabled parking should be much closer.

Disabled driver Hugh Munro showed us the difficulties he faces trying to visit [@TheBotanics](#) with the road realignments – only to find it made even more difficult as the scooter he hires there will after today no longer be brought to his car as a result of insurance concerns pic.twitter.com/Qxj9igRvYC

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [November 9, 2021](#)

To recognise the comments made by Mr Munro since a visit in October the council is however taking action.

Council officers propose in a report for this week’s [Transport and Environment Committee](#) the following measures:

- widening the hatched buffer areas between the traffic

- lane and the on-street disabled parking bays,
- laying new road markings throughout to narrow the traffic lanes – making the pedestrian crossing look narrower and reduce vehicle speeds,
- introduce additional speed reduction measures on approaches including reinstatement of 20mph roundels (painted signs on the road), slow and hazard bar marking on the road to warn drivers of the disabled parking and the pedestrian crossing and
- also to monitor the scheme with site visits to observe driver behaviour, disabled driver access and user feedback.

These measures might be on the ground as early as December following the design phase, making this one of the faster reactions to a complaint by a resident in our experience. We reported the story first on 10 October when Mr Munro, who describes himself as a Disability Rights Campaigner, first brought the matter to our attention.



He explained then that having to exit the car on the roadside was putting both him and the RGBE staff bringing the scooter to him in danger from the speeding traffic.

He made the point that to park with the driver's side to the pavement is in contravention of the Highway Code and he wanted the disabled parking reinstated within the semi circle at the gate.

Now it seems that the problem will be more difficult to solve as the scooters cannot come out of the West Gate to a car. Hugh said: "I can't walk from her to the front desk and this is stopping me from visiting The Botanics.

"Keeping people safe should be the top priority for the council especially the disabled who like to visit the Royal Botanic Gardens, often on their own preserving their freedom to roam. Their relatives need to know that assistance is on

hand and that they are away from the busy main road. They need a safe parking space to exit their vehicle safely. On street parking is simply not safe.”

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Disabled rights campaigner Hugh Munro demonstrated his difficulty in getting into the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh to councillors at the West Gate PHOTOS ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

Councillor Lesley Macinnes, Transport and Environment Convener, said: “The changes at John Hope Gateway have been in place for more than a year and have provided a much safer experience for the many pedestrians visiting the area each day, by reducing the road crossing and improving visibility for drivers. As agreed by Council, and with support from local councillors, we now plan to keep these measures longer term on a trial basis.

“Of course we do recognise the concerns raised here and we have considered the issues raised in detail. We’re working hard to strike a balance between the safety of pedestrians and the needs of blue badge holders, and as we progress the trial we’re developing revisions to the road layout to improve safety for all road users, including more space for passengers exiting cars and speed reduction measures.

“We’ll also be continuing to monitor the scheme to make sure it’s working for everyone, and to minimise impact on disabled drivers and passengers.”

An RGBE spokesperson replied to Mr Munro recently and said: “I am sorry to hear that you have had difficulty finding appropriate parking near to the Garden. All streets around the perimeter of the Garden, including Arboretum Place, are public highways and therefore within the jurisdiction of Edinburgh City Council. Nonetheless, we do understand that

this is a very important matter and we are in close contact with Edinburgh City Council about this matter, and will continue to consult with them about their future plans.”





Road space at the Botanics has been altered with Spaces for People measures to narrow the road and it is hoped to reduce speeding. PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter