

Changes to disabled parking at Botanics still “unsuitable”

Following protests by disabled driver, Hugh Munro, the council has redesigned the arrangements for blue badge parking at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RGE) which it plans to install in January.

The latest design, chosen from four possibilities created by roads officers, increases the number of blue badge spaces to 13 by creating for new parking spaces within the semi-circular areas on both sides of the road at the John Hope Gateway. These deeper bays will be set 4.5 metres back from the road to create a safe space to get in and out of vehicles. The council says it will offer new protected spaces for disabled people at ground level, but Mr Munro says these new arrangements are “nothing new” and wholly unsuitable.



The two new bays will be formed just beyond the Pick Up/Drop Off Zone by moving the black and white bollards back into the semi circle Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

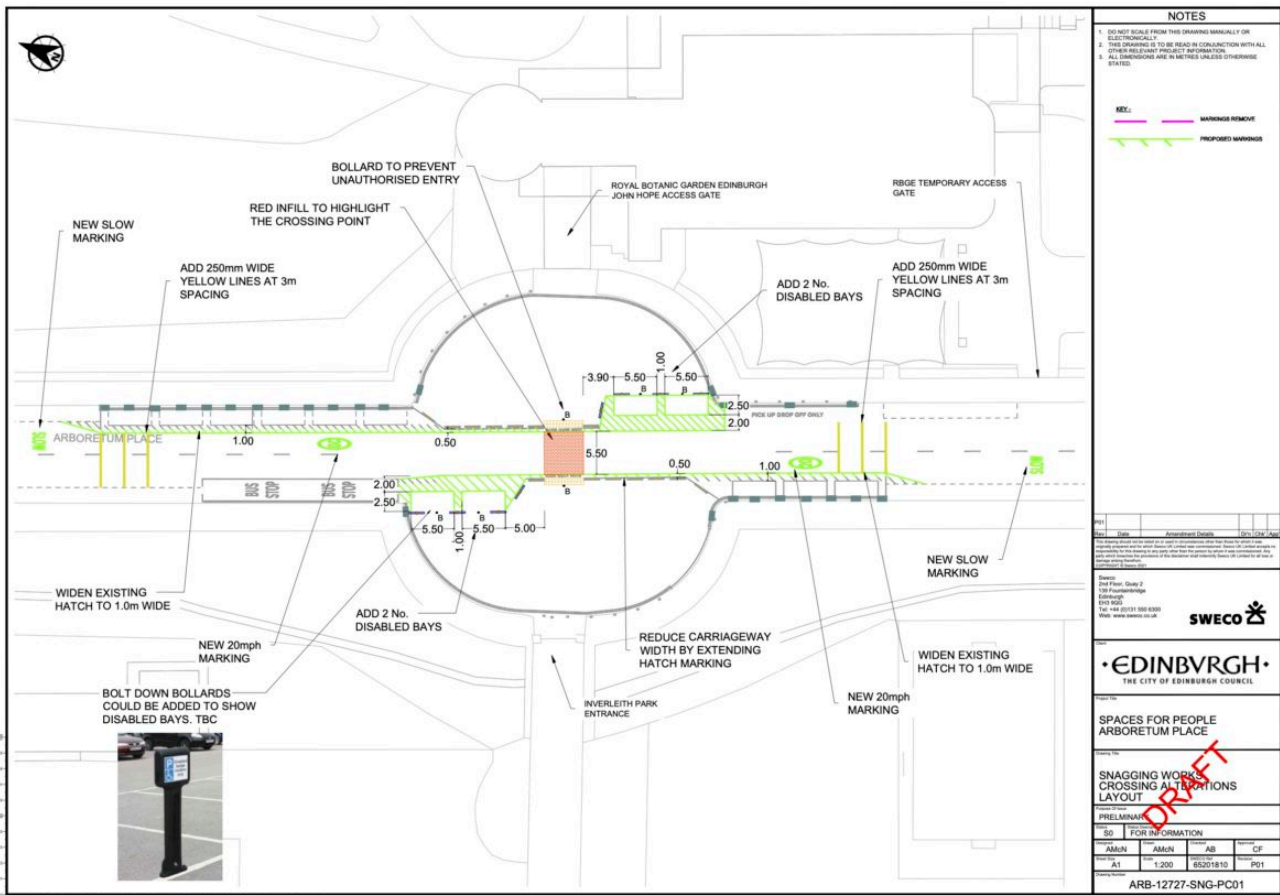


Disabled rights campaigner Hugh Munro demonstrated his difficulty in getting into the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh to councillors at the West Gate PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

Mr Munro said: "This still does not consider that the disabled person might be the driver. Even if these are deeper bays the driver still has to exit on the main road and in my case with sticks having to get round the door to get on to the pavement. The only safe way if the council really value disabled people or the vulnerable. I feel that the council is not listening and have made no changes and I am still in the position as a disabled driver that I cannot access the Botanics."

Cllr Karen Doran, Transport and Environment Vice Convener, said: "We have worked hard to create a revised design which strikes the best possible balance for all visitors to the Botanic Gardens. We have spent a great deal of time liaising with Mr Munro and other stakeholders to address concerns around blue badge parking, and designers, along with our Road Safety team, have considered several options.

"The approved option will increase the number of blue badge spaces, as well as improving the environment around these spaces, while maintaining a safe pedestrian crossing. This will provide additional protection for visitors on foot, particularly those who require longer to cross the road or parents and carers with young children."



The council's draft plans

In forming the parking spaces the council says it has tried to be mindful of the need for safe parking and also maintaining sight lines at the pedestrian crossing. Their main concern is to keep vehicles out of the semi-circles so that there is no danger from any which are parked, moving or reversing.

The hatched areas will be widened to one metre, reducing the road width to 5.5 metres, and additional SLOW signs and 20mph roundels will be painted on the road. The roads team say the new road markings will make the road look narrower particularly during daylight hours.

Council officers met Mr Munro and local councillors on site to discuss the problems which he faced as a disabled driver. The council realigned the space between the John Hope Gateway and the entrance to Inverleith Park to form a pedestrian crossing. Although there are not yet any markings on the road, simply by narrowing the road here, council roads officers hoped to make it safer for pedestrians by slowing vehicular traffic. Such a

crossing has been desired by local councillors for a long time.



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

In blocking off the semi-circles at the entrances, the council had removed disabled parking there. Instead, blue badge holders were given spaces parallel to the kerb where there is a steep camber between the road and the kerb. The council installed ramps for exiting vehicles at the kerbside, but Mr Munro had pointed out it meant any disabled driver going to the Botanics under their own steam would have to exit their vehicle into the flow of traffic.

Mr Munro said that the Highway Code states that a driver must park with the passenger side of the vehicle to the kerb. His own position is that he requires a mobility scooter to get around during a visit to the green space, and the RGBE staff can only allow visitors to use these beyond the gate, and not on the pavement outside or indeed within the semi-circle. The distance between any roadside parking space and the gate is too far for Mr Munro to walk.

Mr Munro declined a recent offer from RGBE to collect him by taxi and bring him to the garden to enjoy their light show Christmas at the Botanics. He said he finds it difficult to use taxis because of his mobility issues, and that since this arrangement would mean using the semi-circle as a temporary drop-off area it would appear "immoral".

Mr Munro also questions whether any buses or larger vehicles carrying disabled passengers would fit into the new parking spaces. He points out that not all have sliding doors on the side, meaning they would require additional room for any tail gate lifts.



The semi circle at the John Hope Gateway where two deeper bays for blue badge holders will be formed Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com