

Conservative councillor claims Spaces for People has “hogged council resources”

A Conservative councillor claims that a new primary school in Edinburgh will not have a safe walking route ready for pupils when it opens next year due to the Spaces for People programme ‘hogging’ council resources.

Victoria Primary School will move from its current site on Newhaven Main Street to a new £12 million building on the Western Harbour, which is expected to be completed in summer 2022.

Last month parents raised concerns with Forth ward councillors about delays to the establishment of a safe walking route for Victoria Primary pupils – many of whom will have to cross the busy A901 until alternative measures are put in place.

“That’s an extremely busy road and officers will have to consider very carefully the best way to address that,” Conservative Councillor Jim Campbell said.

He added worried parents had “got the impression from some council officers” that work to create a safe route for students had been “paused” because of council staff being seconded to the Spaces for People (SfP) programme.

However, The City of Edinburgh Council's Transport Convener, Cllr Lesley Macinnes said SfP, a series of measures put in place during the pandemic designed to create more space on the city's roads and pavements for pedestrians and cyclists, has had "no impact" on resources and planning for the new school.

Cllr Campbell said: "There is a lot of work that goes on in the background and I think parents were raising a concern as to whether that work was progressing fast enough, given that the new school has been planned for some time and hasn't come as a surprise.

"In general terms, I'm aware of colleagues and other people finding that a lot of resources have been put into the Spaces for People programme and it has had an adverse effect on other things that we're trying to do within travelling in the city. Many councillors have come across this issue with Spaces for People hogging resources.

"As to the specifics of this particular case, clearly the convener has said this isn't what happened and it's difficult for me to know because all I've got is the parents concern where they appear to have been told there was a delay because of that."

Cllr Campbell said transport officers were "discussing plans for safe routes to the school" at a recent parent council meeting he attended, adding: "They hadn't been finalised at that stage and they won't be finalised for the school opening which is unfortunate."



Visual of new school

However, fellow Forth ward councillor, and Depute Council Leader Cammy Day insisted that a walking route will be ready for pupils when the school opens.

Cllr Day said: “There had been a flurry of emails from parents probably rightly concerned that the new school – whilst they’re really looking forward to and excited to move into it in the new year – they wanted to make sure that their kids have the safest possible way to get to school.

“It’s not put in place now because the school’s not ready to open, but by the time the school is ready to open, the safe routes to school will be there and all the parents and kids will be made aware of it.”

Transport Convenor Cllr Lesley Macinnes added: “Discussions are ongoing with the school in preparation for opening and it has been agreed that a travel survey for parents will take place at the end of January.

“This will help to establish planned routes which will be used to travel to the new school and to ensure that any new crossing facilities are situated where there is the most

demand. The outcome of the survey will be shared with the school.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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