

Unwanted bin hubs will become part of the New Town – despite warnings to council

Edinburgh councillors have vowed to press ahead with the roll-out of communal “bin hubs” in the New Town – despite repeated warnings that such a move would threaten the capital’s status as a World Heritage Site.

The City of Edinburgh Council has come under fire from two heritage bodies for not taking on board recommendations they said would help reduce the visual impact of the hubs.

Under the new £5.7 million scheme – which was agreed by councillors last April and which has already been introduced in Leith and the surrounding area – household rubbish, recycling, glass, and food waste bins are being placed outside flats and secured in the street by metal railings.

Due to be set up in around 1,750 locations, the communal hubs will replace the gull-proof bags and recycling boxes currently used by

New Town residents, and the changes will likely be implemented later this year.

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) previously warned the council that inclusion of Edinburgh's Old Town and New Town in the scheme "will have a negative visual impact on this part of the World Heritage Site".

"A one-size-fits-all strategy for the wider city, which includes the World Heritage Site will mean that a series of bin hubs will be sited on streets currently without any visible waste collection," HES added.

These calls were echoed by Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH), which wrote: "We are concerned that the current plan to locate numerous new bin hubs across the New Town represents a threat to the visual integrity of the New Town. Adding street clutter will negatively alter the character of our Georgian terraces"

EWH urged the council to retain the current recycling system in the city centre and suggested increasing collections to be daily to reduce the number of bins required on the street.

But the council called the recommendations "not economically viable".

Furthermore, it said the only suggestion being taken forward is to 'change the tone of the green lids on the recycling bins'.

Meanwhile, a recent survey conducted by Edinburgh Central MSP Angus Robertson found 90 per cent of residents do not support the introduction of the communal bin hubs.

Community groups have also voiced strong opposition to the proposals.

In a deputation to the Transport and Environment Committee on Thursday New Town and Broughton Community Council said: "The Council has refused to consult, engage or listen to the residents, their associations, Community Councils and Heritage Organisations.

"The Council had an opportunity to rethink its extremely unpopular policy and consider some small mitigating suggestions. But it has failed to do so, ignored the advice of these Heritage Organisations and taken a "we know best" approach."

A letter from Stockbridge and Inverleith Community Council read: "The proposal is ill thought through, and does not take any account of the unique heritage importance of Edinburgh's nineteenth century new town architecture.

"Improvement to recycling rates is not likely to be made with this scheme."

Also present at the meeting was Edinburgh World Heritage Director Christina Sinclair, who took aim at the committee for not consulting the organisation prior to the scheme's approval last year.

"Following that, EWH and other stakeholders such as Historic Environment Scotland have raised concerns regarding the heritage impact of the proposals and have been advising on a wide range of options that could be considered beyond the communal bin hub proposal, mitigation measures and the need for robust community engagement," she told councillors.

"Since that time we have been productively engaged by the City of Edinburgh Council team working on this matter and collaborated well, I think, to identify meaningful mitigation measures within the World Heritage Site that are practical and balanced.

"Through this we have provided detailed advice to help the

council with a bespoke approach required to protect the character and value of our wonderful World Heritage Site whilst meeting other key city goals.

“We are concerned that these mitigation measures are not being taken forward.

“As far as we can see, and we have access to clear, convincing evidence, we just want to be helpfully clear as a city partner that this is of significant concern to us.

“It is our view that the introduction of the bin hubs in the World Heritage Site without all or the substantial majority of the mitigation measures advised by Edinburgh World Heritage and other heritage stakeholder will cause a significant level of harm to the World Heritage Site.”

Conservative councillor Joanna Mowat moved a motion to take no further action to install bin hubs in streets within the World Heritage Site until “facilitated meetings” are held with residents and heritage bodies to discuss the issues raised.

The Conservative group leader Cllr Iain Whyte said: “This is about consultation and engagement with the community, or rather the lack of it.

“At our best value review of this council, Audit Scotland were very critical of the way we engage with the public and suggested improvements should be made, and as I understood it improvements were to be made.

“But what we see here is actually a vivid illustration of their criticism, because if we really had a good approach to engaging and working with the community then we’d be getting the right solution, a solution that we’re happy with.

“You’d not be having two community councils, two heritage bodies coming and telling us that your bin plans are damaging to a World Heritage Site.”



Albert Street bin hub with parallel parking

Councillors voted 7 votes to 4 in favour of continuing with the city-wide roll out of communal bin hubs as planned.

Convenor Cllr Lesley Macinnes said any delay would have a “bad impact” on the 123,000 residents living outwith the heritage site.

She added there is “a need for balance to be struck”.

“That balance includes due consideration of the World Heritage Site but we’ve also heard that some of the potential solutions being brought forward are not easy ones, they’re not quick ones but we have a requirement to do something about, for example, recycling rates.”

Cllr Macinnes accepted that earlier consultations “could have been done differently”.

She added: “Since we have moved on this, there have been considerable efforts by officers to both understand and react to positively where possible.

“There’s a number of reasons why we as an administration feel we need to press ahead with this but with the clear promise, the clear guidance coming from the administration to officers and with a key acceptance from officers, there is a need to continue monitoring, discussion and finding ways to work

together with people in the World Heritage Site.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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