

Council approves the updated design for George Street and First New Town project

The council's Transport and Environment Committee have approved the next version of the designs for George Street which is the one the council will now proceed on to the next stage.

As we confirmed last week there will be 16 trees introduced – two lots of eight at either end, adding a few more to the council's One Million Tree City pledge.

The street is to be redeveloped as a pedestrian and cycling zone with no parking except for 27 blue badge holders, and access for deliveries and licensed taxis at stated times. The needs of disabled passengers in taxis is still under discussion as the council's team balances accessibility with priority for those on foot or in wheelchairs or on bikes.

Automated bollards will be constructed (who remembers the last iteration of those on Hanover or Frederick Street and George Street?) to provide for public safety.

Key elements of the plans are widened pedestrian areas and a reduction in parking all operated under the First New Town plan which will set out taxi and bus access on side streets.

In the next phase there will be more details set out for the layouts in Hanover, Frederick and Castle Streets.



The funding for these plans is provided largely from Sustrans Scotland's Places for Everyone programme with the council responsible for 30% of the cost. There is a possible shortfall of £10 million at present and councillors agreed to look at the impact of this major project on other Active Travel plans. It is hoped that more external funds will become available, and the project will not begin until 2025. The George Street First New Town project is shortlisted in the Pineapple Awards celebrating excellence in place-based design and development. It has also been nominated as a finalist in the Scottish Design Awards Master Planning category.

Cllr Scott Arthur, Transport and Environment Convener, said: "In updating designs and operational plans for the GNT project, the project team has worked closely with the community, key stakeholders and elected members to develop proposals which will both enhance the space for all those travelling through and spending time in the area but also retain the First New Town's unique historic value.

"I know the potential inclusion of trees on George Street will be welcomed by many, now their inclusion has been approved more work will be done to ensure the position and type of

trees is sympathetic to the street's iconic character.

"We have also listened carefully to the Edinburgh Access Panel and have agreed blue badge holders should have full access to up to 27 blue badge spaces in the George Street and First New Town area."

This latest update marks an exciting milestone in the GNT project and it will allow us to move forward with the final stages of development before construction begins.

Minister for Active Travel, Patrick Harvie, said: "I welcome the latest approved designs for the George Street and First New Town project. With over £13 million being invested by the Scottish Government, the introduction of more trees alongside improved walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure will create a more pleasant environment for people to enjoy.

"This work, supported by Sustrans Scotland, is part of our record funding for active travel in 2023/24 and we remain committed to investing at least £320 million or 10% of the transport budget for active travel by 2024/25."

Simon Strain, Head of Places for Everyone Programme at Sustrans, said: "We are pleased to see the final operational plan for George Street and First New Town approved by members of the Transport and Environment Committee, along with updates to the proposed design".

"The funding awarded for this project will help make everyday walking, wheeling, and cycling journeys a reality, as well as improving biodiversity and creating a new space for people to spend time and relax in Edinburgh city centre."

Stuart Hay, Director, Living Streets Scotland said: "Edinburgh is currently one of the least pedestrianised historic cities in Northern Europe, so we are delighted to see progress in the plans for a place that prioritises people, not cars. George Street has the potential to become the heart of the city,

creating a much-needed public space of high quality.”

