

Council pays out £80,000 compensation to pedestrians

Insurance claims from pedestrians who have tripped over on Edinburgh's streets have cost the council more than £80,000 since 2018, new figures have revealed.

Loose paving stones, overgrown plants, bollards, street clutter and all forms of trip hazard which can cause people to fall and injure themselves continue to cost to the public purse despite efforts to make the capital's streets safer.

And campaigners have warned that without more funding for the capital's pavement maintenance budget the number of pedestrians suffering serious injuries is likely to increase.

The vast majority of claims made against the local authority relate to accidents around the city centre, with 42 on Princes Street alone. The top 10 most-reported streets also include George Street, St Andrew Square, Rose Street, Frederick Street and Dalry Road.

In total there have been 95 claims made against the council in the last five years which total £82,624.

Living Streets Edinburgh, which campaigns for safer and more accessible streets for pedestrians, said this was "only the tip of a massive iceberg".

David Hunter, the group's convener, said as pedestrian fall injuries are not included in road safety data many incidents "go unrecorded".

He added that well-maintained pavements are “an absolute basic requirement for a city that wants to encourage walking”.

Mike Birch, 67, recently sprained his ankle on Leith Street where a new cycle path has been installed.

He said: “I obviously wasn’t paying attention to the fact the cycle path was at a lower level than the pavement and I just went over my ankle.

“Having those cycle paths at a different level is actually good in terms of visibility to blind people, so I understand why those things are there, but of course the problem is that when you’re in a shared space area [with cyclists] that then introduces some more hazards.

“While I recognise moving cyclists off the road is a good thing to do, it doesn’t come without some cost and that cost is the interaction with pedestrians.”

He added that the most common hazard he observes are broken or uneven paving slabs and road signs left out on pavements.

For 56-year-old Maria, who lives on The Royal Mile and is registered as disabled, the main issue comes from shopkeepers cluttering the pavement, which she has called on the council to crackdown on.

“I have fallen a couple of times in the High Street,” she said. “I’ve put numerous complaints into the council about the issue of shops increasing the amount of stock out on the street – particularly outside my front door.

“The pavements aren’t the best in the city centre because articulated lorries and big vans park on the pavement and it damages the pavement.

“10 years ago I could leave my front door and you could scoot up the side of the shops and avoid people but now there’s so many rails and stuff in the street – it’s impossible.

“The streets have changed incredibly in the last 10 years. There’s long rails of clothing everywhere and baskets of tat. I don’t understand why a shop has to put its stock in the street.

“The council have rules against this but it doesn’t enforce them. The situation in the street is just making my life miserable.

“I would like to see shops become shops, not market stalls. They have no consideration for people who live here.”

The council banned A boards and other pavement clutter outside shops in [May 2018](#), but there are exemptions during the Festivals and for election purposes.

Another Edinburgh resident, who asked to remain anonymous, said they slipped off a high kerb whilst walking along Leith’s North Fort Street and displaced their hip.

“I struggle with walking anyway and this put me in agony,” they said. “I am however, most concerned about the huge concrete wall at the end of North Fort Street Bridge preventing me from accessing the tram and local shops because the diversion is further than I can comfortably walk.”

Living Streets previously successfully campaigned for the ban on A boards in the city and have also carried out a review of street clutter. The project, which originally aimed to find 100 items to ask the council to remove, ended up identifying 290 hazards.

According to the organisation, the top four problems in Edinburgh were signs, poles, bins, guardrails and hedges/vegetation. “We found plenty of other problems such as roadworks signs and semi-derelect phone kiosks,” it said.

In response, 226 bollards, 139 signs and poles, 300 metres of guardrail and other reported hazards were removed by the local

authority.

More recently Living Streets has criticised the council's new Road Safety Plan for failing to mention "injuries from pedestrian on-street falls with no collision involved".

It said that serious injuries from pedestrian falls is likely to have increased in Edinburgh "alongside the ageing and the deterioration in the condition of the pavements owing to cuts in the maintenance budgets".

It added: "Without an increase in the maintenance budget that is targeted on eliminating the growing multiplicity of trip hazards on pavements it seems that the incidence of falls and serious injuries to pedestrians will inevitably continue to increase."

Meanwhile Green city councillor Kayleigh O'Neill, who is a wheelchair user, recalled "two or three occasions where I've slipped out the chair or fallen because of cracks in the road or pavements".

She said such incidents are "quite frightening" and "a wee bit of a morale punch".

She said the new City Mobility Plan (CMP) – the council's long-term proposals to change how people will move about the city to improve accessibility and cut carbon emissions – was a "positive step forward".

However she added it was "clear that disabled voices haven't been taken into account from the start".

She added: "I say that with all the respect to the officers because they have done the work and they have identified the problems, they know and note that we need to ramp up a dropped kerb programme, we need to make buses more accessible, we've got all these little points – but they're asking people to prioritise their wants and needs and I fear that if it comes

to improving access or improving more cycle paths than the cyclist lobby are bigger, stronger and better funded and they will get what they want quicker.

“There needs to be some sort of baseline of access that the council needs to adhere to.”

Cllr O’Neill said a key goal would be seeing city’s dropped kerb programme given extra funding and “ramped up”.

She said: “It sounds quite small but if in three years if I could say we’ve dropped 3,000 more kerbs I’d be pretty proud.”

Cllr Scott Arthur, Transport and Environment Convener, said: “Making sure our streets are accessible and safe for walking or travel by wheelchair is a real priority, and this year we’re investing more than ever to maintain pavements and footpaths – but I know it won’t be enough.

“Through our Active Travel Action Plan we’re also focusing on actions to improve conditions for pedestrians, whether that’s decluttering public spaces or ensuring pavement surfaces are flatter, as well as industrialising our ongoing dropped kerbs programme.

“I do appreciate that trips and falls can pose a real danger to people, though the Road Safety Action Plan is specifically designed to reduce the numbers of people being injured on our streets. However, through our roads and pavements maintenance programme, alongside a range of projects to help people walk wheel and access public transport, from the transformation of George Street to the [measures introduced for the Festival](#), we will continue to put pedestrians at the top of the transport hierarchy.

“This is central to the City Mobility Plan, which aims to deliver a sustainable, well connected and inclusive transport future for Edinburgh. The needs and experiences of road users of all abilities were taken into account as part of the CMP’s

development and the recent consultation.

“This was both through engagement with stakeholders, such as accessibility groups and groups representing people with mobility issues and through market research and focus groups. The latter sought to ensure we heard the views of as wide a range of people as possible, including those with mobility and visual impairments.

“The recently closed consultation had around 3,000 responses from the breadth of Edinburgh’s diverse communities, and we already have plans in place to discuss the outcomes with Edinburgh Living Streets and groups representing people with disabilities. If the CMP does not make walking, wheeling and accessing public transport easier it will have failed.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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