

No time to hang around in Holyrood Park

Professor Johan Rockström gave the 44th TB Macaulay lecture in Edinburgh in the majestic McEwan Hall. His lecture was about some of his most internationally recognised work – the Planetary Boundaries.

The latest iteration of this work, by an international team of scientists, shows that there are nine boundaries required for planetary resilience and six of the nine are already being crossed. These include climate stability, biodiversity and the quality of our water and air. Crossing boundaries carries severe consequences for us and nature.

We already have devastating floods, droughts, forest fires and intensifying storms across the world. Rockström explained that there will be no safe landing on climate if we don't act now to bring the other planetary boundaries into a safe space, too.

The professor's overarching question affects us all. What is the safe operating space for humanity's future on earth, and what are the sustainable transformations that can take us there? Given the robust scientific evidence of where we are now, these questions feel both terrifying and overwhelming. The only way I can deal with them is considering them at a local level.

It was with this in mind that I sat down to read Historic

Environment Scotland's current consultation on its strategic plan for Holyrood Park. I was pleased to see that some of the major issues covered in Professor Rockström's lecture are addressed at park scale. These include managing the park in a way that makes a positive contribution to both reducing dangerous emissions and developing resilience to the changing climate. For example, a lot more carbon can be locked up in the soil and vegetation to reduce emissions going into the atmosphere through better management. Improving surface water management can also help safeguard the city. And significant improvements can be made to the ecology of the park to support diverse habitats for plants and wildlife.

Other important aspects are the objectives to create an inclusive park and to make active travel the main travel mode to the park and through it. Moving away from prioritising cars in spaces like this is part of how we decarbonise the city, by creating the space and confidence for many people to take up less polluting travel modes. All of us enjoy spending time in green spaces with wildlife that are not dominated by traffic and associated noise and pollution. And all of us benefit from being able to walk, wheel or cycle safely and comfortably without having to worry about hazardous junctions or close-passing drivers.

To achieve this in the park in an inclusive way means ensuring that those disabled people who currently rely on private cars to enjoy the park have genuine accessible alternatives. The existing status quo in Holyrood Park is inequitable, and closing the road to motor vehicle traffic will immediately open the paved and accessible space to be used by people on mobility scooters, children on bikes, and people pushing prams. It is vital that disabled people are involved in rapidly designing and facilitating sustainable options for a truly inclusive park. One initiative that can support inclusive access is Cycling Without Age Scotland's trishaws. Low-carbon, community-led, inclusive transport options like

these can be part of the change around the park. It is just one example of what communities can do when the road space is open for people walking, wheeling and cycling.

Professor Rockström's messages to us were clear. Humans have become the single most influential species on the planet. We are living now through the turbulence of our impacts with devastating consequences on people, biodiversity, and the natural processes that we need to sustain us. We are reaching tipping points that are irreversible.

Holyrood Park, with its massive presence in Edinburgh, could become a beacon of what real sustainability looks and feels like at the local level. Please respond to the consultation and call on Historic Environment Scotland to speed up the implementation of these measures. There is no time to waste.

Read about the Planetary Boundaries here.

<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

[Read Historic Environment Scotland's document here and respond to the consultation here.](#)

The consultation remains open until 19 December 2023 and there will be an in person event at **Greyfriars Charteris Centre** 138/140 Pleasance, Edinburgh, EH8 9RR on Saturday 2 December, 10am-4.30pm.



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