

Ramp does not reflect Edinburgh World Heritage advice

A ramp built in the centre of Charlotte Square has prompted questions from locals and criticism from Edinburgh World Heritage.

The ramp is, we understand, part of wider plans to improve the square which has included narrowing traffic lanes and adding “segregation kerb units”. The council held an engagement event in June last year to discuss the interim and the permanent design.

At Thursday’s Transport and Environment Committee the ramp was raised by Cllr Iain Whyte when streets nearby, and in particular the possibility of introducing cycling on Rose Street, Hill Street, Young Street and Thistle Street, was under discussion. (This was part of the update on City Centre West to East Link (CCWEL) to George Street Active Travel Connections.)

Cllr Whyte asked for work on these streets to be brought to a halt meantime “until the safety considerations raised by New Town and Broughton Community Council are investigated”, although that position was not eventually adopted by councillors.

But he took the opportunity to talk about Charlotte Square when all the council officers were on hand to answer his questions.

Cllr Whyte said: "It's interesting that Charlotte Square is mentioned because I have read the deputation from the community council, and I too wonder what the purpose of the new ramp is – to get to the other side? I don't know. What is it?

"This is a World Heritage site, and the new ramp has led to many comments on social media and from local residents. As I understand it there is no dropped kerb on the other side so I am not sure how this is actually benefitting people."

A council officer responded that the ramp is "very temporary" to ensure that it is accessible for anyone crossing over from George Street, and that the council has a duty over accessibility. It was also admitted that the council will look at enhancing the look of the ramp and also that they will be putting up a sign to say it is temporary.

But later, council officers confirmed that heritage groups and community councils had been consulted, but that it will not be until 2027 at the earliest that any permanent works can be carried out in Charlotte Square because of the time it takes to get traffic orders passed.

The New Town & Broughton Community Council wrote in their deputation: "it is not clear what the interim solution is intended to achieve and whether the money that has been spent on this work represents good value for the city and its residents. As has been reported in the media recently, the temporary ramp has been constructed in materials and to a design that is completely out of place in Charlotte Square within the Edinburgh World Heritage Site. Why has this been rushed in when there are no approved plans for George Street without proper engagement with the relevant heritage bodies?"

Edinburgh World Heritage

A spokesperson for Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH) told The Edinburgh Reporter they are disappointed with the ramp, although it is understood to be temporary, and said: “This does not reflect the advice we and heritage colleagues within the Council provided.

“The style of the ramp is not in keeping with its context – a globally-recognised Georgian square in the heart of our city’s UNESCO World Heritage Site.

“EWH shares in the Council’s commitment to make Edinburgh inclusive and accessible to all. We look forward to working with City of Edinburgh Council, heritage partners, disabled people and other key stakeholders on the development of a permanent design for the Square that sensitively reflects and enhances the unique character of our city.”

Transport and Environment Convener, Cllr Stephen Jenkinson said ahead of the meeting: “The ramp in question is to make sure Charlotte Square is accessible for all, as part of the interim scheme.

“We’re committed to the permanent solution being in keeping with the wider World Heritage site and will continue to take on board the views of local residents and stakeholders.”

