

Planning Committee

10am, Thursday 7 August 2014

Environmental Quality Indicators

Item number	8.1
Report number	
Executive	Executive
Wards	City wide

Executive summary

In June 2012, Committee approved a set of indicators to assess the 'delivery of good quality development' element of the Planning Performance Framework and the impact of Planning decisions.

It was recommended that they be reviewed on an annual basis to help ensure that the outcomes of planning decisions maintain and support the quality of the city's environment.

This report advises Committee of the results of the third year of using the indicators and suggests a way forward for the project in future years.

Links

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Environmental Quality Indicators

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
1. notes the results of the Environmental Quality Indicators for the third year and supports their continued use; and
 2. approves the development of the project and its refocusing at the local level.

Background

- 2.1 The Scottish Government is keen to find a way of measuring the quality of development on the ground as a mechanism for defining a high quality Planning Service. The Planning Performance Framework (PPF), which recommends the inclusion of a measure of good quality development, was introduced by planning authorities in 2012.
- 2.2 In June 2012, the Committee approved a set of indicators that responded to the 'delivery of good quality development' element of the Planning Performance Framework and were responsive to the impact of planning decisions. They reflect quantitative or qualitative factors that provide a representative picture of environmental conditions and provide a basis for comparison. The indicators were developed in association with Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland, the Cockburn Association, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Edinburgh World Heritage.
- 2.3 It was recommended that they be reviewed on an annual basis to help ensure that the outcomes of planning decisions maintain and support the quality of the city's environment.

Main report

3.1 This report presents the results of the third year of using a set of indicators to measure the impact of recent development on the environmental quality of Edinburgh. The indicators have four main strands:

- Direct Rating of Perception of Users;
- The City Biodiversity Index (CBI or Singapore Index);
- Awards; and
- Added Value. The Added Value strand was added this year and involves an appraisal of the design value added during the processing of planning applications. It forms an action in the Planning and Building Standards Service Plan 2014/15.

Direct Rating of Perception of Users.

3.2 This is a process whereby the customers, or users, of the environment are asked about their perceptions of its quality. The degree of satisfaction is governed by a wide range of factors which reflect quality. There are two separate strands involved in this approach:

- the Edinburgh People Survey; and
- the use of Focus Groups.

3.3 The **Edinburgh People Survey** focuses on satisfaction with Council services and quality of life issues. Each year, around 5,000 Edinburgh residents are interviewed, forming a demographically representative sample of each of the city's 12 neighbourhoods. The latest survey was held in autumn 2013.

3.4 As part of the last three surveys, a question on the perceived quality of the built environment was included in the Survey. The question was:

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of new buildings and the spaces around them in your local area?

(the results of the responses to this question are shown in Appendix 1 and are also summarised in Appendix 5).

3.5 77% of all respondents were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the quality of new buildings and the spaces around them in their local area. Compared to that, 2% said they were either fairly or very dissatisfied and 21% were either neutral or had no opinion. Satisfaction has decreased from 86% in 2012 with the level of dissatisfaction remaining much the same and an 8% increase in no opinion.

- 3.6 This information has also been broken down into the different neighbourhood areas. Satisfaction with the quality of new buildings has fallen from the previous year in all of the neighbourhood areas, the largest fall being in Leith, Forth and Liberton/Gilmerton. The highest level of satisfaction and smallest drop is in Portobello/Craigentinny. The levels of dissatisfaction with new buildings remain low. The largest increase for all areas is in the neither satisfied nor dissatisfied/no opinion categories.
- 3.7 As might be expected, the three years of results show fluctuations, and, with only three sets of data, it is not possible to draw any significant conclusions. However, in the various neighbourhoods across the city, levels of satisfaction never falls below 63% and levels of dissatisfaction never rise above 7%. The results from further years will be needed before any trends can be identified with confidence.
- 3.8 **Focus Groups.** The Focus Groups took the form of short video clips of nine recent developments across the city (detailed in Appendix 2) which were rated on a five point scale in terms of how well they fitted with their surroundings and how attractive they were. The Focus Groups were held at the East and West Neighbourhood Centres, the St James Shopping Centre, Ratho library and Ratho Climbing Centre. Edinburgh World Heritage, the Cockburn Association and Historic Scotland took part in the groups and a total of 200 individuals participated. The survey was also made available online and 585 individuals completed the questionnaire. Details of the developments and the results from the Focus Groups and online survey are included in Appendix 2.
- 3.9 The average scores for 2014 (online results are shown in brackets) for the nine schemes indicate that 65% (52%) of respondents considered that the developments fitted in well with their surroundings and that 59% (46%) considered that they were attractive. The levels of dissatisfaction were much lower, with 15% (23%) considering the developments did not fit in with their surroundings and 18% (30%) that they were not attractive. Appendix 3 show comparisons with previous years.
- 3.10 This year's results for the Focus Groups are very similar to those from last year with a small increase in the measure of attractiveness. There is a small percentage drop in both measures for the online survey.
- 3.11 The information gained for the Focus Groups will become more significant as more years are added. As with The Edinburgh People Survey, only limited conclusions can be drawn from the three years of figures. However, what has become apparent is the very positive way

in which the Focus Groups have been received by the public. This is establishing positive relationships between communities and the Planning and Building Standards Service and improving the public's understanding of the planning process. It is, therefore, proposed to develop further this strand of the Environmental Quality Indicators (see para 3.21).

The City Biodiversity Index (CBI or Singapore Index)

- 3.12 The City Biodiversity Index provides a structured method for measuring performance and assigns scores based on the services that biodiversity provide, such as pollination and carbon sinks and how well a place manages its biodiversity - for example, by setting up a biodiversity partnership or an organisation to document species and habitats.
- 3.13 Data has been gathered from various sources including the Wildlife Information Centre and the Council's research team. The Cities Biodiversity Index will progress from year to year as information is recorded and submitted that reflects changes to the natural environment. The number of indicators currently reported on is 13. In future years there may be further alignment with the Edinburgh Living Landscape Indicators, a project which aims to manage the city's landscape with a view to improving biodiversity. The results remain largely the same as the data collection has a cost associated with it and in the main will be updated every 5 – 10 years (See Appendix 5).

Awards

- 3.14 Awards are normally based on an impartial assessment by independent agencies. They can provide a measure of quality over a range of factors and a relative performance assessment against other local authorities. Awards for planning related projects are currently monitored. A list of recent awards for Planning related activities is at Appendix 4. This is extensive and includes awards for both individual buildings and recognition on a city-wide basis. Three of the most relevant awards (the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning, the RTPA Awards and the Civic Trust Awards) have been adopted as the key awards indicator. These are national awards which relate directly to the impact of new development on the built environment.
- 3.15 The development at Sugarhouse Close won commendations from both the Civic Trust Awards and the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning. The Assembly Rooms refurbishment also won a commendation from the Civic Awards and the Council's Planning Processing Agreements were commended by the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning.

Added Value

- 3.16 The Added Value project is a way of recording the improvements that officers make to planning applications in the course of negotiations. An Added Value module has been created in the Uniform system that allows officers to record the improvements that have been made to the quality of new development at both pre-application and application stage. The module is split into themes which are broken into individual issues that directly relate to aspects of policy and guidance. The project is at an early stage and, reports are being compiled on a three monthly basis. This will be available to inform the next analysis.
- 3.17 The Added Value project is seen as an important addition to the Environmental Quality Indicators project in terms of being able to link back into processes which take place before any development takes place.

Academic Assessment

- 3.18 The Council has worked with students and academics at Heriot Watt University for a second year to assess the current format of the Environmental Quality Indicators and suggest methods of improving their viability and effectiveness. The main recommendation relates to the potential to amend existing planning processes in the light of information collected from the Edinburgh People Survey and the Focus Groups. The need to align the added value elements with the focus group work is also identified.

Analysis

- 3.19 An analysis of the first three years has shown the following positive outcomes from the project:
- For the first time information is available on what the public think about particular developments after they have been constructed;
 - The public particularly value face to face discussion with Planning staff in the Focus Groups;
 - Public awareness of the planning process has been raised which should lead to more informed comments on developments;
 - The process has allowed the Planning Service to gain the views of specific sections of the public e.g. young people; and

- The success of the process has allowed it to be used for other projects e.g. the review of the conservation area character appraisals.

3.20 However, it is recognised that the number of developments used for the Focus Groups is small and that a larger sample would provide better data. It is also recognised that a larger sample would allow data to be collected at a local level where people have stronger views about their particular neighbourhood. Finally, it is recognised that the outputs need to feed back into, and influence, existing planning process. A key change is therefore proposed to support these points and take the project forward.

Taking the Project Forward

3.21 It is intended to take the project forward by building on the positive aspects of the existing processes and focussing it to deliver usable outputs at a neighbourhood level. This will be achieved by assessing 10 developments in each of the six neighbourhood areas. This will provide much more detailed information. In addition:

- it will provide the area teams with information on the views and opinions of the local communities on specific developments. This will be the first time that such information is available *after* developments have been constructed rather than through comments on planning applications;
- it will allow the tracking of the impact of developments that have been assessed through the *Added Value* project;
- the information can be collated on a city-wide basis to identify issues where there may be a mismatch between planning decisions and public opinion; and
- the local outcomes can then be fed back into the relevant planning team providing an insight into local planning issues. The process can be used as a catalyst for discussion of planning issues and it should ultimately lead to greater engagement and a more informed input from the local community.

Resources

3.22 One of the most challenging issues for this project has been that of resources. Therefore it is proposed to carry out the project on a biennial basis.

Conclusions

3.23 The results of the Environmental Quality Indicators are summarised and collated in Appendix 5. These indicate that there continues to be a relatively high level of satisfaction with the quality of development and

a corresponding very low level of dissatisfaction in terms of the Edinburgh People Survey and Focus Groups. However, it is recognised that only limited conclusions can be drawn from only three sets of data.

- 3.24 The three year pilot for this project is now complete. As a result of this pilot it is proposed to continue the project with but with some changes in approach. The new approach will reinforce the positive aspects of the existing process and put more of a focus on developments at a local neighbourhood level. Developments assessed for Added Value will be tracked and the results fed back to the Planning area teams. This will act as catalyst for discussions of local planning issues with a view to achieving greater engagement and more informed input from the local community.

Measures of success

- 4.1 The Environmental Quality Indicators demonstrate a continuous improvement in the quality of Edinburgh's built and natural environment.

Financial impact

- 5.1 The proposal to focus on gathering information at the neighbourhood level may have a resource implication, but this should be contained by carrying out the surveys on a biennial basis.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The Indicators project allows an assessment of the impact of new development on the built and natural environment. A measurement of environmental quality is required to form part of the Planning Performance Framework. A degree of risk would follow from not carrying out the Indicators project in terms of feedback into the statutory planning process.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The survey processes for the Indicators involved a wide range of community representatives.
- 7.2 Access for the disabled was a potential issue for consideration in the Focus Group assessments of the new developments. All venues complied with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- 7.3 There was a general positive or neutral impact on equalities and rights.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The indicators will assist in improving the quality of the built and natural environment, and have a positive impact on sustainability.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Some of the data for the Indicators was derived from Focus Groups. These comprised groups at the East and West Neighbourhood Centres, the St James Shopping Centre, Ratho library and Ratho Climbing Centre. Edinburgh World Heritage, the Cockburn Association and Historic Scotland took part in the groups and a total of 200 individuals participated.

Background reading / external references

1. Report to Planning Committee, 8th August 2013, Environmental Quality Indicators
2. City Biodiversity Index:
<http://www.cbd.int/authorities/gettinginvolved/cbi.shtml>

John Bury

Acting Director of Services for Communities

Contact; Jack Gillon, Principal Practitioner

Email Jack.gillon@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3634

Julie Dewar, Planning Officer

E-mail: julie.dewar@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3625

Links

Coalition pledges [P40](#)

Council outcomes [CO19](#)

Single Outcome Agreement [SO4](#)

Appendices

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Appendix 1 - Results of Edinburgh People Survey

Appendix 2 - Results from Focus Group 2013/14

Appendix 3 – Results from Focus Groups and Web based Survey 2012- 2014

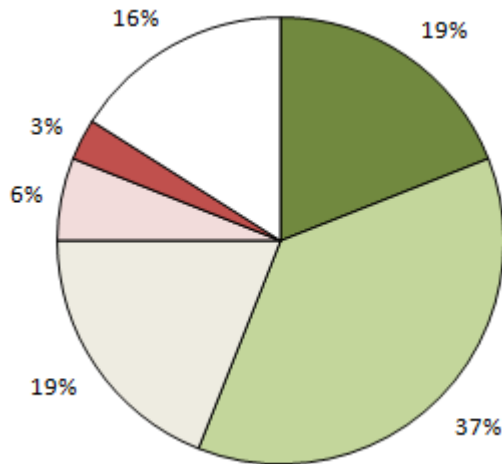
Appendix 4 – Awards

Appendix 5 - Results Summary

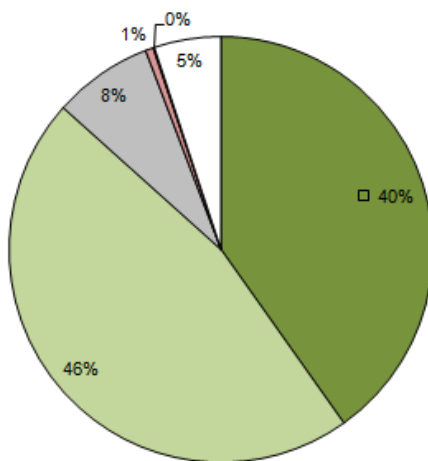
APPENDIX 1 – RESULTS OF EDINBURGH PEOPLE SURVEY

Responses to Question: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of new buildings and the spaces around them in your local area?

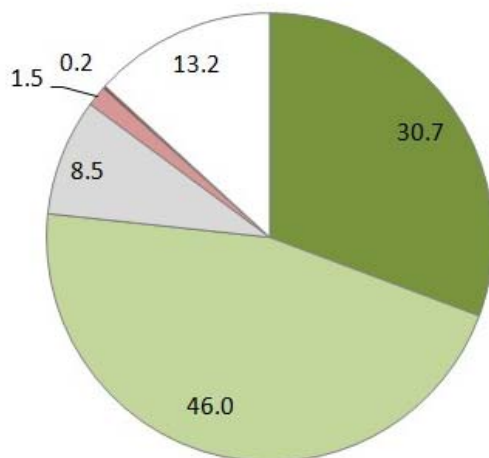
City Wide Results



2011



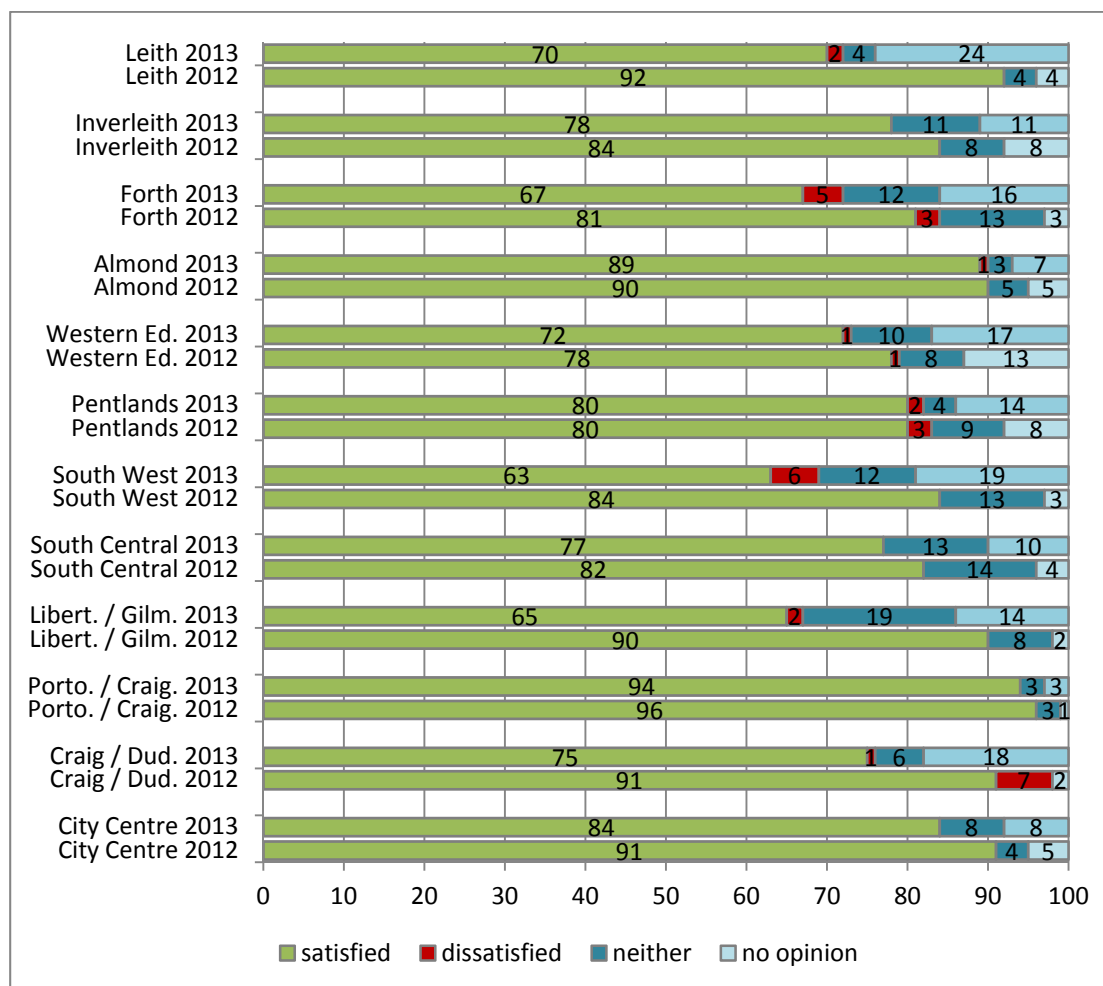
2012



2013

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- no opinion

Neighbourhood Results





APPENDIX 2: RESULTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS 2013/14





How Well Does the Building (Site) Fit with its Surroundings (%)

Site	Very/Fairly Well	Very/Fairly Badly	Neither Well nor Badly
<p>East Sussex Road – Care Home</p> 	50 (39)	34(46)	16 (15)
<p>Inglis Green Road – Retail Development</p> 	52 (52)	17 (19)	31 (29)
<p>Royal Botanic Gardens – Alpine House</p> 	61 (43)	20 (39)	19 (18)
<p>Southhouse Broadway – Housing Development</p> 	78 (78)	4 (9)	18 (13)
<p>Candlemaker Row – Community Facility</p> 	71 (61)	13 (26)	16 (13)

<p>Duddingston Park South – Supermarket</p> 	46 (50)	18 (18)	36 (32)
<p>Ardshiel Avenue – Care Home</p> 	81 (70)	7 (12)	12 (18)
<p>Blinkbonny – Housing Conversion</p> 	85 (96)	5 (1)	10 (3)
<p>Craigmount Crescent – House Extension</p> 	60 (49)	18 (34)	22 (17)
<p>Summary for all sites</p>	65 (52)	15 (23)	20 (25)

How Attractive is the Building (Site) (%)

Site	Very/Fairly Well	Very/Fairly Badly	Neither Well nor Badly
<p>East Sussex Road – Care Home</p> 	60 (35)	22 (49)	18 (26)
<p>Inglis Green Road – Retail Development</p> 	43 (26)	29 (37)	28 (37)
<p>Royal Botanic Gardens – Alpine House</p> 	68 (52)	18 (36)	14 (12)
<p>Southhouse Broadway – Housing Development</p> 	59 (51)	16 (24)	25 (25)
<p>Candlemaker Row – Community Facility</p> 	72 (56)	12 (24)	16 (20)
<p>Duddingston Park South – Supermarket</p>	30 (18)	39 (43)	31 (39)

			
Ardshiel Avenue – Care Home 	78 (62)	7 (13)	15 (25)
Blinkbonny – Housing Conversion 	79 (91)	5 (2)	16 (7)
Craigmount Crescent – House Extension 	42 (27)	19 (39)	39 (34)
Summary for all sites	59 (46)	18 (30)	23 (24)

Appendix 3 - Results from Focus Groups and Web based Survey 2012- 2014

Fit	2012	2013		2014	
	Focus Groups	Focus Groups	Web-based	Focus Groups	Web-based
Well	62%	66%	61%	65%	52%
Badly	18%	15%	24%	15%	23%
Neither	20%	19%	14%	20%	25%
Attractive	2012	2013		2014	
Attractive	53%	53%	49%	59%	46%
Unattractive	23%	21%	27%	18%	30%
Neither	24%	26%	24%	23%	24%

APPENDIX 4 – AWARDS (May 2013-present)

RICS SCOTLAND AWARDS 2013 WINNERS

Winner Building Conservation Award

The Scottish National Portrait Gallery - The newly renovated gallery fought off competition from over 50 of the country's most impressive built environment projects to win the Project of the Year title, which is presented to the scheme demonstrating overall outstanding best practice.

Regeneration Award - Quartermile (Highly Commended)

Commercial Property Award - The Assembly Rooms (Winner)

Infrastructure Award - The Forth Bridge (Winner)

Residential Property Award - Archers Hall development (Winner)

2014 CIVIC TRUST AWARDS

Commended - Sugarhouse Close, Oberlander Architects

Commended - Assembly Rooms, Refurbishment and upgrade, LDN Architects

RIAS AWARDS 2013

Award

The Chapel of Saint Albert the Great, Edinburgh Simpson & Brown Architects
(Client: The Order of Preachers)

"This building is markedly different from the historic property to which it is attached. However this is a supremely elegant and attractive solution, a place of worship that invites visitors in."

Highly Commended

Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh (£7 million approx.) –

RIBA AWARDS 2013

The Chapel of Saint Albert the Great, Edinburgh Simpson & Brown Architects
(Client: The Order of Preachers)

EAA Awards 2014

Building of the Year - Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation - Malcolm Fraser Architects

Small Projects - Inverleith Row, Flat extension - WT Architecture

SALTIRE SOCIETY 2013

Small Dwelling Award 2013 - The Ramp House Portobello (Chambers McMillan Architects)

SCOTTISH AWARDS FOR QUALITY IN PLANNING

Commendations

Quality of Service - City of Edinburgh Council: Planning Processing Agreements

The Council has been one of the first in creating a transparent process for handling major applications. This involved the creation of a new template, as a project management tool, for planners handling major applications.

Development on the Ground - City of Edinburgh Council: Sugarhouse Close

The aim was to maximise the setting of the existing buildings within, what had become, a derelict and rundown area. As a result, the development delivers a well-considered 'space to live' for students, all achieved within a limited budget.

SCOTTISH CIVIC TRUST MY PLACE AWARDS 2014

My Place Awards 2014 - Grassmarket Community Project wins 27 March 2014

The Grassmarket Community Project in Edinburgh, designed by Gareth Hoskins Architects has won the Scottish Civic Trust My Place Awards 2014.

Winner

The Grassmarket Community Project, nominated by the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, is a new facility in the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town, offering support, encouragement and meaningful opportunities for local people in an inclusive and engaging environment. It offers a range of social activities, educational classes and social enterprises to enable people to progress towards healthier and more sustainable futures.

The Project developed from a long-standing partnership of the Greyfriars Tolbooth and Highland Kirk and the Grassmarket Mission. As well as providing excellent services for its staff and members it also offers a first-class conference and meeting room venue for organisations across Edinburgh.

The judges said:

"This is a high-class facility for its members and wider Edinburgh community. It is a people-led project which radiates warmth, humanity and sense of equality. It is innovative, full of natural light, and has been woven seamlessly into the fabric of the adjoining buildings, streetscape and Greyfriars Churchyard.

Both designers and client deserve wide recognition for this jewel of a project which enhances and uplifts Edinburgh's Grassmarket. It is a worthy winner."

APPENDIX 5: RESULTS SUMMARY

Edinburgh People Survey			
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of new buildings and spaces around them in your local area?			
Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or no opinion	
2011 56%	2011 9%	2011 35%	
2012 86%	2012 1%	2012 13%	
2013 77%	2013 2%	2013 21%	
Focus Groups			
How well does the building or site fit with its surroundings? (Online results in brackets)			
Very/Fairly well	Very/Fairly badly	Neutral or no opinion	
2012 62%	2012 18%	2012 20%	
2013 66%	2013 15%	2013 19%	
2014 65% (52)	2014 15% (23)	2014 20% (25)	
How attractive is the building (site)? (Online results in brackets)			
Very/Fairly attractive	Very/fairly unattractive	Neutral or no opinion	
2012 53%	2012 23%	2012 24%	
2013 53%	2013 21%	2013 26%	
2014 59% (46)	2014 18 (30)	2014 23% (24)	

City Biodiversity Index			
Indicator Number	Results		
	2011	2012	2013

Indicator 1 Proportion of natural areas in city.	NA	15,288.1 ha	15,288.1 ha
Indicator 2 Connectivity measures or ecological networks to counter fragmentation.	3359ha	3359ha.	3359ha
Indicator 3 Native biodiversity in built up areas (Bird Species).	118	118	118
Indicator 9 Proportion of protected natural areas.	18.1%	18.1%	18.1%
Indicator 10 Proportion of invasive alien species (as opposed to native species).	NA	It is only possible to say 14 invasive species have been recorded in Edinburgh	14
Indicator 11 Regulation of quantity of water.	75%	75%	75%
Indicator 12 Climate regulation: carbon storage and cooling effect of vegetation.	18%	18%	18%
Indicator 15 Budget allocation to biodiversity.	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%
Indicator 16 Number of biodiversity projects implemented by the city annually.	158	158	158
Indicator 17 Policy, Rules & Regulations – existence of Local Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan .	NA	Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-2015	Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-2015

Indicator 18 Institutional Capacity: Number of essential biodiversity-related functions that the city uses.	NA	N/A	4
Indicator 19 Institutional Capacity: Number of city or local government agencies involved in inter-agency cooperation pertaining to biodiversity matters.	NA	5	5
Indicator 21 Participation & Partnership: Number of agencies/private companies /NGOs/ academic institutions/ international organisations with which the city is partnering in biodiversity activities, projects and programmes.	NA	27	27
Indicator 22 Education & Awareness: Is biodiversity or nature awareness included in the schools' curriculum.	NA	92% eco school participation	92% eco school participation

Awards	2011	2012	2013
Scottish Awards for Quality In Planning	Grassmarket Pubic Realm Award	Delivery of Affordable Homes - Commendation	Commendations Quality of Service - City of Edinburgh Council: Planning Processing Agreements Development on the Ground - City of Edinburgh Council: Sugarhouse Close
RTPI Awards	Planning Concordat - Commendation Grassmarket Pubic Realm - Finalist	No Entries	No entries

Civic Trust Awards	National Museum of Scotland - Award and Special Award for Scotland Scotsman Steps - Award	National Portrait Gallery – Award Vine Trust Barge – Award and Award for Community Impact and Engagement	Commended - Sugarhouse Close, Oberlander Architects Commended - Assembly Rooms, Refurbishment and upgradre, LDN Architects
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