

Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 14 October 2020

Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy – project scope

Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	City Centre
Council Commitments	15, 43

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee agrees the scope for the preparation of the Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy and the outline programme set out in Appendix 1.

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Report

Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy – project scope

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report scopes a new Strategy for Princes Street and the Waverley Valley to inform future development and management of the valley landscape, the role and use of buildings on Princes Street and its environs, and the quality and offer of its public realm.
- 2.2 The Strategy will sit within the context of City Plan 2030 as non-statutory planning guidance and complement delivery of the Edinburgh City Centre Transformation programme (ECCT) and World Heritage Site Management Plan.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Waverley Valley plays a defining role in establishing contrast between the medieval Old Town and Georgian New Town, an urban structure which is unrivalled in the World, and forms a key part of the statement of Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site. The valley is a fundamental space for the city's wellbeing, civic and cultural life through its gardens and public realm, the wealth of listed buildings and scheduled monuments and their settings, its art collections, exhibition spaces and cultural attractions, its transport infrastructure including Waverley Station and the ability for people from across Edinburgh and beyond to pass through and experience the city's strong sense of identity.
- 3.2 Within this built and natural arena, which this Council has a duty to conserve and enhance, The Scottish National Gallery Project, development of Edinburgh Waverley Masterplan, and the renewal of West Princes Street Gardens through the Quaich Project, as well as seasonal use of the valley for events, highlight some of the individual challenges and pressures exerted on the townscape and a need for the valley's evolution to be sensitively managed with a strategic perspective.
- 3.3 The valley's southern escarpment is formed by the defensive form of the Old Town, with landform, bridging points and Improvement Act streets defining access across to the New Town but affording iconic vistas from elevated locations such as the

Castle, upper slopes of Princes St Gardens and The Mound, Waverley Bridge and North Bridge and glimpsed views channelled through its historic closes. George Street forms the high point of the valley to the north, and the prime street in James Craig's Plan for the First New Town with the roofscape gently following the topography down to Princes Street, where its retail frontage of over one kilometre from east to west forms the main built enclosure. The cross streets of the New Town provide important views across the valley to the Old Town and Castle. Despite its unique views to the Old Town and Castle, the street faces challenges as a result in the decline in traditional department stores, growth in online retailing and a locational shift in prime city centre retailing in the form of competition from George Street and the soon to be realised, redeveloped and enhanced Edinburgh St James to the east.

- 3.4 As identified through the ECCT, Princes Street's public realm needs to be improved to provide a high-quality experience, which befits its historic setting; the quality of surface materials and street furniture are below the standard expected for a regional centre for retail and leisure and an iconic World-renowned street. A growing body of evidence, including publications by [Living Streets](#) and [Transport for London](#), show the beneficial economic impacts to businesses in high streets when space for walking and cycling is prioritised.
- 3.5 Across the UK, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the expansion of online retail. The [Office for National Statistics](#) in May 2020, reports that internet sales accounted for 32.8% of total UK retail sales. The pandemic also brings challenges in terms of its impact on both international and domestic tourism, notably the cancellation of the city's summer festivals. Meanwhile many offices are operating at reduced capacity with many commuters continuing to working from home, impacting on trade for city centre businesses. The crisis highlighted the value of open spaces, as places of tranquillity for essential exercise and wellbeing and the need for footways, public realm and the cycle network to provide sufficient space to enable safe movement and protection from vehicles. It is also important to consider Princes Street as a place to dwell and experience its remarkable context.
- 3.6 The Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy will therefore set out coordinated site-specific guidance to conserve the city's historic townscape in response to development pressures, whilst ensuring its continued adaptation and ongoing value to contemporary life, as a place for all to enjoy the beautiful and iconic surroundings.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Set within the context of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Management Plan and the City Centre Transformation Programme, the Council intends to prepare a Strategy for Princes Street and the Waverley Valley. The scope of this planning and operational strategy shall comprise three key and interrelated workstreams as follows:

- 4.1.1 The Waverley Valley Conservation and Access Plan;
- 4.1.2 Princes St Framework - buildings and uses; and
- 4.1.3 Princes St Public Realm Design Code.

The Waverley Valley Conservation and Access Plan

- 4.2 The juxtaposition of Edinburgh's medieval Old Town and its neoclassical New Town, which is an integral component of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site, is heightened and contrasted by the great landscape divide of the Waverley Valley, creating an outstanding urban landscape composition, including planned vistas and a spectacular skyline. The [Statement of Outstanding Universal Value \(SOUV\)](#) explains the importance of the World Heritage Site in full.
- 4.3 The Waverley Valley and wider World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) is protected by national planning and historic environment policy, by legislation protecting Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings, Ancient Monuments and nationally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes. Castle Rock forms part of the Arthur's Seat Volcano Site of Special Scientific Interest and many local planning policies serve to protect its open space, trees, biodiversity, special landscape character and its skyline and views.
- 4.4 World Heritage Sites are defined as a 'sensitive area' in the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations, which may trigger the need for certain developments within the Valley to undertake Environmental Impact Assessments. Other protections include [legal restrictions](#) on the type of building which may be erected in Princes Street Gardens and height restrictions upon Waverley Market.
- 4.5 The World Heritage Site Management Plan (2017/22) interprets the Site's important qualities and sets actions to protect and manage it through the work of partners Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the City of Edinburgh Council and Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH). Other management tools include:
 - 4.5.1 [Princes Street Gardens Management Plan](#) (2017-20) and its related Conservation Management Plan (2003); and
 - 4.5.2 [The Edinburgh Sustainable Lighting Strategy](#) – which seeks to retain the skyline's contrast between lighting and dark skies.
- 4.6 Recent change to the Valley includes: implementation of New Waverley to the south and east of the Station; restoration of Jacob's Ladder by Edinburgh World Heritage and the Council, supported by the New Waverley Fund; unimplemented consent to reconfigure Waverley Mall's rooftop terrace – including new raised roof-top accommodation; the Scottish National Gallery Project at the Mound, providing new exhibition space, landscaping and access improvements to East Princes Street Gardens; and the restoration of the Ross Fountain by The Council, EWH and Ross Development Trust with funding from Historic Environment Scotland.
- 4.7 Forthcoming considerations include: the detailed planning application process to deliver the Waverley Station masterplan by Network Rail; and the Ross Development Trust's proposals to replace the Ross Theatre with a new event

pavilion, associated facilities, landscaping and access improvements. As ECCT also progresses, central streets will be increasingly oriented towards walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport and new areas of public realm established, such as at Waverley Bridge.

- 4.8 In recent years, the seasonal use of Princes Street Gardens for Edinburgh's winter and summer festivals has drawn some public criticism relating to the intensity and duration of use and impact on the character of the Valley. Such use will be reviewed through the development of the Council's Public Space Management Plan, which will guide the future use and management of parks and public spaces for events and activities.
- 4.9 As a townscape with a unique character, the Waverley Valley is the product of the interaction of natural and human factors across the centuries, there is a risk that extensive change within a relatively short timeframe may alter the authenticity and intact nature of this key aspect of the OUV of the World Heritage Site. Equally strategic opportunities to influence future change that support the objectives of the World Heritage Site Management Plan should be built-in to forward plans for the area.
- 4.10 The process of developing the Waverley Valley Strategy will achieve the following:
- 4.10.1 review and bring into one place all relevant Council policies and proposals for the use of land and development of the Waverley Valley;
 - 4.10.2 work with partners, to review the care and maintenance of built, natural and cultural heritage assets and where possible seek to enhance their setting, interpretation and accessibility; and
 - 4.10.3 consider where new guidance is required in order to ensure the valley's continued conservation and adaptation in response to the city's contemporary needs.
- 4.11 The Strategy will address a number of issues and considerations, including:
- 4.11.1 the need to preserve and enhance Edinburgh's iconic skyline and retain a contrast in character between the Old and New Towns; to review the protection of views and height controls that define the Waverley Valley – including a roofscape that follows the topography and deals sensitively with roof plant, contemporary issues such as rooftop access, solid-to-void relationships and night-time illumination of key buildings. The setting of listed buildings, scheduled monuments, the New Town Gardens designed landscape and other public art/statuary will also be considered;
 - 4.11.2 to support the city's ambitious target to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 through the sensitive management of the valley, its structural plantings, buildings and economic activity and to consider its potential adaptation to increased temperatures, increases in rainfall and its intensity, and to further biodiversity and support the Million Tree City initiative;
 - 4.11.3 the value of its Gardens and public spaces in providing for physical and mental health, wellbeing and recreation and their ability to improve liveability

for residents within a densely built up area, including through provision of public seating and cycle parking, opportunities for play, public art, feature lighting and spaces for communities to meet, get involved in food growing or nature-based activities;

4.11.4 the need to improve inclusive access to Princes St Gardens and to explore the valley's potential role in providing strategic east-west links - including to areas beyond, such as King's Stables Road, Castle Terrace and car park, Lothian Road and Festival Square; as well as north-south to Princes Street, the wider First New Town and The Mound;

4.11.5 alongside the Public Space Management Plan, to ensure the valley supports events and activities commensurate with its status and community needs and to explore opportunities to support dispersed activity across the network of public realm; and

4.11.6 arrangements for servicing and maintenance within the valley in the context of a city centre with more restrictions on vehicle access.

4.12 Through engagement on the development of the Waverley Valley Strategy, The Council and partners will seek to ensure that stakeholder organisations and communities of interest work effectively together in pursuit of these objectives.

Princes Street Framework - Buildings and Uses

4.13 Princes Street contains a wealth of original townhouses, purpose-built department stores, clubs and hotels and includes a significant number of listed buildings - including two post-war Princes Street Panel buildings, as well as contemporary premises erected in the last 30 years.

4.14 Whilst Princes Street remains the main shopping street in Edinburgh and the Lothians and is a focus for tourism activity, the changing nature of retail, including competition from out-of-town retail parks and the shift to online sales, means that the economic success of the city centre must be based on a more diverse mix of activities and leisure-based experiences.

4.15 In response, in January 2020, aligned with the ECCT programme, the Council updated the [Supplementary Guidance for City Centre Shopping and Leisure](#). For the first time, this provides greater flexibility for non-shop uses on Princes Street. Up to one-third of any block can now include Class 3 (food and drink) or Class 11 (assembly and leisure) in order to support the city's regional focus for retail and leisure and to cater for an alternative experience that competes with online transactions.

4.16 The Council's [Retail and Leisure Commercial Needs Study](#) for City Plan 2030 identified the ongoing need for comparison shopping floorspace in the city centre beyond 2023, following the anticipated opening of the St James development. However, this work pre-dated the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and further shift in retail activity online, as well as the impact of a reduction in office workers, visitors and residents shopping in city centres and slowdown in consumer spending, as reported by the [British Retail Consortium](#).

- 4.17 In response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on retail and the decline or restructuring of historic high street stores, a review of block-by-block opportunities to sustainably adapt and repurpose or renew building stock, underutilised space, and support uses compatible with Princes St and the World Heritage Site overall, will be undertaken by the Planning service. This may include opportunities to provide city centre living at upper levels, evaluate the mix of non-shop use supporting leisure and tourism, explore potential for smaller units suited to independent retailers and food outlets, to encourage an appropriate balance between day-time and night-time activity and animation, to establish greater permeability between urban blocks (via connections to Rose Street and Rose Street Lanes referencing historic arcades), and to create active ground floor uses - visually linking interior and exterior space and the Gardens beyond and providing interest from the footway.
- 4.18 The Street retains unique strengths as a destination, its south-facing aspect, views to the Old Town skyline and axial views to Calton Hill and via the New Town streets to George Street; its proximity to key transport infrastructure, including bus, tram, rail and connections to the airport; and its relationship to cultural destinations such as Princes Street Gardens, the Royal Scottish Academy and Scottish National Gallery on the Mound, the Scott Monument, as well as the expanding Fruitmarket Gallery, City Arts Centre and Collective Gallery on Calton Hill. The West End's attractions of the Usher Hall, Traverse Theatre, Lyceum and Filmhouse are also within easy reach. Edinburgh's diverse cultural heritage offer and its World Heritage Site remain key reasons to visit the City or spend time in the city centre.
- 4.19 Redevelopment opportunities along Princes Street are being actively realised, including the change of use from the former Frasers store at the West End to become a £150m Johnnie Walker visitor centre with ancillary retail, bars, offices, training and event space. In 2017, planning permission was granted for the redevelopment of the category B Listed 64 Princes Street, the purpose-built British Home Stores (BHS) building. The structure of the BHS building is retained and will comprise retail use at basement, ground and first floor levels. Hotel accommodation is proposed on the second, third and fourth floors with a separate restaurant at fifth floor.
- 4.20 The proposed redevelopment of the Jenners building at the east end of Princes Street, a category A Listed Building which was one of the largest department stores in Britain when it opened 1895, is to restore and re-invent the building through a mixed-use strategy. Planning and Listed Buildings applications are forthcoming for redevelopment and change of use of the existing premises occupied by Debenhams, at the category B Listed Buildings at 109-112 Princes Street and category C Listed 144-150 Rose Street, to form a hotel including a restaurant fronting Princes Street. Ongoing development activity underlines the continued importance of Princes Street and its potential to adapt.
- 4.21 The Strategy will take a focussed and proactive approach to Princes Street's blocks and review the forward-looking Princes Street Framework/String of Pearls (2007). It will consider the different opportunities to the west, centre and east of the Street

and support renewal where blocks may be in decline without the draw of a major retailer, destination or mix of uses and identify where new uses could act as a catalyst for the block and neighbouring premises.

- 4.22 The Strategy therefore will seek to create opportunities for investment, growth and jobs and enhance the overall environment of Princes Street and the Waverley Valley. Where barriers to unlocking the potential of the street exist, the Council will consider ways it can assist the renewal of Princes Street in moving forward, including preparing development briefs.

Princes Street Public Realm Design Code

- 4.23 The World Heritage Site Management Plan recognises the essential contribution of spaces between buildings and public realm to the OUV of the Site. However, despite the prime retail frontage and prospect to the Castle and Gardens, the fabric of Princes Street comprises tired concrete paving, out of keeping with its historic context. Whilst upgrades have been made through the introduction of the Tram, only 37% of the 4,192 respondents surveyed in 2018 were satisfied with the quality of central streets and spaces.
- 4.24 Footways are often congested for shoppers and public transport passengers, including those with sensory or mobility impairments, and broken-up by the wide east-west cross streets. There are few places to dwell and benches on the south side of the street are oriented away from views and towards traffic. With our changing climate resulting in more intense downpours, poor drainage resulting from previous footway widening requires to be resolved.
- 4.25 ECCT is an ambitious plan for a vibrant and people-focused capital city centre which seeks to improve community, economic and cultural life. It outlines a programme to enhance public spaces to better support life in the city, by prioritising movement on foot, by bike and by public transport.
- 4.26 To support Princes Street's role as a focus for retail and leisure across the region, the ECCT Strategy, identified the need for public realm improvements to be made along the full length of the street. This should be enhanced by the gradual rebalancing of priorities from vehicles to people and improved north-south connections to George St, Rose St and southwards to Princes Street Gardens.
- 4.27 Through ECCT, improvements at the east end of Princes Street will be brought forward to enhance connections for walking, wheeling and cycling to St Andrew Square and the redesigned George Street. This will involve the introduction of traffic restrictions and a spur of the City Centre West-East Link. These works will complement public realm upgrades at Register Lanes and the St James quarter, and the upgrading of surfacing along Rose Street, which has commenced between Frederick St and Hanover Street. The Meadows to George Street project will integrate with the George Street and First New Town redesign at the junction of Hanover Street/The Mound. Public realm upgrades are also anticipated at the West End outside the Johnnie Walker Experience and through the reconfiguration of the West End Junction.

- 4.28 However, as a planned street within the First New Town, Princes Street's public realm lacks an agreed design code, including a consistent approach to materials, its key junctions, drainage and levels, street furniture, waste containment and cycle parking. The code should sit within the palette of materials generally agreed for use within the New Town including sandstone flagstones and whin kerbing but respond to Princes Street's unique context and enhance the setting of its key buildings, monuments and its adjacent civic spaces and Gardens.
- 4.29 As redevelopment occurs within the Princes Street blocks and where public realm and active project delivery interact with the existing street, design consistency is crucial to ensure a co-ordinated approach is taken to the entire street. By 2030, the draft City Mobility Plan seeks to reduce through traffic and radial routing of all buses via the city centre. The public realm design code will require to be adaptable over-time: firstly, to optimise the street's design and improve its condition in the shorter term but also to allow space to be re-allocated in the future to create a more people friendly street that supports public life alongside movement e.g. by providing greater pedestrian comfort and reducing overcrowding, introducing protected space for cycling, dwell space and public seating or improved access to Princes Street Gardens.
- 4.30 It is proposed that the Design Code would constitute both a future vision for the street as a place for residents, workers and visitors to spend time in the city and a technical study setting out principles for delivery, funded through ECCT Phase 2 from the Sustrans Places for Everyone Scheme and that this would be incorporated in the Council's Street Design Guidance. This would provide detailed, costed and deliverable actions to support financial planning, funding applications and to evidence developer contributions.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to approval by Committee, the next steps will involve:
- 5.1.1 early dialogue with community councils, key stakeholders and wider partners to develop the baseline of the Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy;
 - 5.1.2 a workshop with members of the Planning Committee and local ward Councillors;
 - 5.1.3 fieldwork to review the Princes Street Framework and complete development activity reporting such as Edinburgh's retail survey to monitor occupancy; and
 - 5.1.4 scoping and procurement of the Public Realm Design Code through the ECCT programme.
- 5.2 The project timescale allows for a further progress report to Committee in early 2021, ahead of wider public consultation.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 This project, as part of the Placemaking Agenda, is being delivered by the Council's Planning service. Existing staff resources are being used. Approval of this report will not result in any further financial impact.
- 6.2 The development of a Princes Street Public Realm Design Code will be funded as part of a £1m award from the Sustrans Places for Everyone scheme to develop future stages of ECCT.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The development of a Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy is informed by national insights and trends and recent local consultations on the World Heritage Site Management Plan, ECCT, City Mobility Plan and consultation and retail sector workshops led by the City Plan team for City Centre Shopping and Leisure Retail supplementary guidance. In the Preparation Stage of the project (see Appendix 1) community councils, key stakeholders and wider partners will have an early opportunity to contribute to the development of the project.
- 7.2 Preparatory work has also included a review of previous studies and guidance, together with a workshop involving Council services with an interest in the area, including Parks and Greenspaces, Transport, Property, Commercial Development and Investment, Policy and Insight, Culture, Homelessness and Housing Support, Localities, and Waste and Cleansing.
- 7.3 Subject to identifying appropriate engagement and consultation methods during the Covid-19 adaptation and renewal period, it is anticipated that draft materials will be available as part of city-wide opportunities for citizen consultation in early 2021.
- 7.4 The Proposals in this report will seek to deliver Council Commitment 15 'Protect Edinburgh World Heritage Status and make sure developments maintain the vibrancy of our city in terms of placemaking, design and diversity of use.' The Strategy will also contribute to the protection of Princes Street Gardens as major recreational resource (Commitment 43).
- 7.5 Whilst Public Realm strategy falls under the remit of the Planning Committee, any design code for Princes Street will be reported to the Transport and Environment Committee for information with relevance to ECCT programme delivery.
- 7.6 The measures described in this report will continue to support a shift towards active and sustainable travel by making it easier to walk, wheel and cycle, sustainable management of the city's green spaces and the re-use and renewal of historic building stock.
- 7.7 The next stages of the project will include screening in terms of Strategic Environmental Assessment and preparation of an Integrated Impact Assessment.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Management Plan](#), report to Planning Committee, 11 December 2017.
- 8.2 [Edinburgh City Centre Transformation – Finalised Strategy](#), report to Transport and Environment Committee, 12 September 2019.
- 8.3 [Supplementary Guidance City Centre Shopping and Leisure](#), report to Planning Committee, 29 January 2020.
- 8.4 [City Centre Princes Street Development Framework – Executive Summary](#), report to Planning Committee, 4 Oct 2007.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy - Outline Programme.

Appendix 1

Princes Street and Waverley Strategy – Outline Programme

Stage	Indicative Timeline	Description
Preparation	Oct – Dec 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dialogue with Community Councils' key stakeholders and wider partners to develop the Strategy's baseline;• review of the Princes Street Framework• fieldwork to undertake retail survey to monitor occupancy; and• scope and procure Public Realm Design Code through ECCT
Interim Report	Early 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• update report to Committee and propose key topics for public consultation to shape Strategy.
Draft Strategy Report and Consultation Period	Spring/summer 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• seek opinions from key stakeholders and wider public on potential way forward.
Finalised Strategy	Autumn 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• review consultation feed-back, revised and prepare final Strategy for approval.