

Edinburgh City Centre Transformation

Living Streets Edinburgh Group wanted to have a deputation attending Full Council to put forward our comments in support of this item, but unfortunately prior commitments mean this has not been possible. Instead we would like you to consider this short statement.

The Council took a bold decision when embarking on this project, potentially on a par with the decision by its forebears to build the New Town. We supported the consultation earlier this year, indeed we urged the Council to extend the principles throughout Edinburgh in CityPlan2030 and the City Mobility Plan.

It is critical that the report before you today is approved. Having started on this path, it would be tragic to go backwards. We are, however, concerned that the strategy and proposals as they now stand have lost some of the ambition, sense of urgency and need for momentum reflected in the initial consultation. The Council chose to label this project as “Transformation” which means “an extreme, radical change” or a “marked change in form, nature, or appearance”. The gradual and partial change set out in the proposals is not transformation, but it can be the starting point for it.

Human beings are designed to walk, it’s our default setting, its what we do. Yet the land use and transport planning systems of the last 70 years have increasingly taken their lead from the private car and bent over backwards to accommodate it. I am writing this as a professional town planner and car owner, so like others, I have been part of the problem and its now time to change.

The Council recognizes that Edinburgh is a walkable city with an excellent public transport system, but the dominance of motor vehicles makes it deeply unpleasant and unhealthy to walk, or even cycle, on many of its streets. That’s why you decided to be ambitious and do something about it.

This need to change reflects the Scottish Government position in Scottish Planning Policy Para 273, which clearly states:

*"The spatial strategies set out in plans should support development in locations that **allow walkable access to local amenities and are also accessible by cycling and public transport**. Plans should identify active travel networks and promote opportunities for travel by more sustainable modes in the **following order of priority: walking**, cycling, public transport, cars. The aim is to promote development which maximises the extent to which its **travel demands are met first through walking**, then cycling, then public transport and finally through use of private cars. Plans should facilitate integration between transport modes."*

It is reasonable to view City Centre Transformation in the context of this policy advice. It is also fair to say that the existing LDP does not comply with this particular aspect of Scottish Planning Policy, but in light of Scottish Government's rejection of the SDP for, *inter alia*, lack of compliance with Para 273, it is important that City Centre Transformation and City Plan 2030 do not make the same mistake.

The report before you seeks to carry the project forward, but there are hints of dilution of the ambition and pace required to make more of our streets free of traffic and safe and pleasant for walking. Living Streets Edinburgh Group is keen to work with the Council and others to regain momentum, ensure that all aspects of the programme make acceptable provision for walking and fulfill the potential of the original concept.

It is therefore important that you accept the principles of the report before you, but in so doing the Council is also urged to:

- formally adopt the movement hierarchy as set out in Scottish Planning Policy;
- recognise the urgency of the situation by reviewing all aspects of the programme to do more for walking, to do it in a shorter timeframe, and with a lot more upfront activity in the next couple of years;
- extend the same principles throughout Edinburgh as part of CityPlan2030.

Finally we would like to record our appreciation of the work to date by Councillors, Daisy Narayanan and colleagues.

Don Nicholass-McKee
Convenor
Living Streets Edinburgh Group