



Response to the Draft Edinburgh Public Realm Strategy (DEPRS)

Greener Leith welcomes this opportunity to respond to the DEPRS and agrees that the material quality of the public realm plays a key role in the success of Edinburgh. Public realm matters - not just as a means of attracting business investment or tourists, but also as a key factor affecting the quality of life of residents. While the Old and New Town are undoubtedly the jewels in Edinburgh's crown, there are many other neighbourhoods that have a great deal to offer from a built heritage and public realm perspective.

Leith, in particular, has a great deal of heritage value and must surely figure as one of Edinburgh's more interesting neighbourhoods: nestled around its ancient harbour, its intimate scale medieval street pattern largely still intact and yet close to the centre of Edinburgh, Leith is still home to a wealth of historic civic and residential buildings, unique industrial heritage, as well as vibrant open spaces. Amongst the latter - the Water of Leith runs through the area, a potential tourist magnet, offering easy access to some of the most interesting inner-city walking and cycling routes anywhere in the UK.

On the whole though, despite its lively cosmopolitan atmosphere, Leith suffers from chronic under investment in much of the public realm. There are many places in urgent need of investment. For this reason, Greener Leith does not agree that Edinburgh has a good overall record in delivering high quality public realm projects.

Whilst recent capital investment projects in St Andrews square and the Grassmarket are worthy of praise, it is clear that there is a major mismatch between the revenue budgets for maintaining the public realm, and capital budgets for improving specific areas.

In Leith, like many of the suburbs in Edinburgh, this mismatch between capital and revenue budgets results in a poor quality public realm, with poor quality repairs, and poor maintenance leaving our parks and street-scapes blighted by piecemeal repairs to road surfaces, rusty or broken railings, outdated signage, illegible road markings, dilapidated hard landscaping in parks, litter, graffiti, fly-posting, dog fouling, chewing gum stains and weed growth. These are all maintenance problems, and need to be addressed by any public realm strategy. Without adequate maintenance budgets, capital investment in our public realm is wasted.

Vision and Objectives

The Vision and Objectives expressed in the DEPRS document are a good starting point, however Greener Leith would wish to make the following points.

Whilst we note that the document highlights the health benefits of walking, we are surprised that it does not mention cycling once. We know from our own research and the research of others, that the design quality and maintenance of public realm is a key factor in promoting active travel. The DEPRS should contain a clear commitment to increase all modes of active travel and explicitly support both Scottish and city targets to increase the amount of journeys made by cycle and on foot. The DEPRS should provide guidance on the standards that are expected of both public and private developers in delivering public realm works in this regard.

We also note that the DEPRS makes no mention of climate change, despite recent legislation that puts Scotland at the forefront in tackling this issue. The City of Edinburgh must play its part in meeting the statutory target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 42% by 2020. Greener Leith would argue that any new public realm project in Edinburgh should take account of climate change, in terms of both mitigating the effects of climate change and adapting to the consequences of climate change. As a consequence, responding to climate change should feature as a further specific objective of the DEPRS.

Lastly we note that although the DEPR acknowledges clear links with various other council strategies, no mention is made of relevant CEC transport strategies. This is surely an omission?

Objective 3 - Investment priorities.

Considering the overall state of Leith's streets and public places, Greener Leith would be keen further information on exactly how objective 3 'priorities for investment in the public realm' will be decided and reviewed. We would argue that a more transparent and comprehensive community involvement process could be used to establish city wide priorities for investment. In the interim, we would propose that the following points are taken into account when establishing investment priorities for the DEPRS.

Many of the points below reflect a public consultation that Greener Leith is currently running that asks Leithers, "what would help you to walk, cycle or take public transport more?" Currently the top five proposals in order of most popular first, are: 'Pedestrianise the Shore'; 'Dedicated cycle lanes to be added to all arterial routes'; 'Build a Green Bridge over Leith Walk'; 'Invest more resources in tackling litter, dog fouling and graffiti' and 'The coastal promenade won't be finished for decades -invest in a cross Leith cycle route.'

1. The recent Edinburgh Greenspace Audit (Draft) calculated that the average amount of open space per 1000 people in Edinburgh is 4.25 ha. In the Leith Partnership area this figure however is only 1.35ha, or about one third of what the rest of Edinburgh enjoys. Leith's open spaces are very heavily used and generally in bad condition. Leith Links, a Premier Park, is a telling example: of all Premier Parks in Edinburgh the Links are the smallest and the least well kept according to its score of 54 points in the Park Quality Assessment Score. The other Edinburgh Premier Parks have scores of between 64 and 81. Greener Leith hopes that as part of this public realm strategy document any future improvements to these open spaces will be aimed at evening out these widely differing scores, so that all the residents of Edinburgh are able to enjoy a similar quality of open spaces. In addition, we propose, with the support of the Leith Neighbourhood Partnership, that investment in Leith Links is included in the DEPRS document as a priority.
2. Following on from the recent decision to give planning permission for the work of Anthony Gormley to be installed on the Water of Leith, Greener would welcome the provision of more world-class public works of art as part of the streetscape in Leith, possibly linking with the 'sculpture trail' that is to be established along the water of Leith. There are only two artists in Scotland that have permanent exhibitions dedicated to them in Scotland; Sir Eduardo Paolozzi the sculptor and John Duncan Fergusson the Colourist. Both of them are from Leith. This is something that should be celebrated.
3. Greener Leith supports calls to ban cars and buses from parts of Princess Street and/or George Street on the completion of the tram works, and urges these proposals to be considered when commissioning public realm improvements in these areas.
4. Greener Leith would like the DEPRS to consider investment in cycling infrastructure as a key priority throughout the city. This should involve extending the network of traffic free routes, as well as ensuring that major public realm investments incorporate the needs of cyclists throughout the city fabric. For example, we note in a recent consultation on the design principles relating to Picardy Place, cycle facilities, such as parking and dedicated cycle lanes were notably absent.
5. DEPRS mentions the £17m was needed to renovate Castle Street, St Andrew Square and the Grassmarket. Considering that Leith Walk covers many times those areas, we question whether £2m will suffice to renovate all of Leith Walk to the same specification streetscape?
6. Following the 'Car Free Day on the Shore' that Greener Leith organised recently, we note considerable public support for the pedestrianisation of the Shore. Whilst more work needs to be done to establish feasibility for full, part and/or permanent or weekend only pedestrianisation of this area, we believe this should be prioritised in the DEPRS.
7. Whilst we note the DEPRS includes mention of the waterfront promenade project, we understand that it will not be complete for many decades. In the interim, Greener Leith would propose that a temporary 'cross Leith' route is developed, focussing on improving the traffic free routes from Portobello, via Leith Links, and on to Sandport Place and the existing West Edinburgh cycle network. We believe this 'Cross Leith' route should be included as a priority in the DEPRS too.

Objective 4

Greener Leith supports moves to develop a clear process for obtaining and managing private sector 'developer' contributions towards the maintenance of public realm. However the DEPRS should also ensure that piecemeal investment is avoided, and clear long term maintenance arrangements are established at the outset.

Furthermore, we note that in larger developments, such as the Forth Ports regeneration proposals, investment in the public realm is often the last stage of the development process. In some cases, developer contributions and construction of public realm should take place earlier in the development process. This last point should also be considered by the public realm strategy.

About Greener Leith

Greener Leith aims to promote community involvement, improvements to public spaces and sustainable development in the Leith area of Edinburgh. Greener Leith is a Scottish Charity SCO40838 and a Company Limited by Guarantee No. 365095. More information is available from www.greenerleith.org