

Greener Leith Comments on Draft Picardy Place Design Principles.

Submitted 10th April 2009

About Greener Leith

Greener Leith is a non-profit organisation that aims to improve the environment in and around the Leith area. Greener Leith has recently been awarded funding from the Scottish Government Climate Challenge Fund in order to encourage residents of the Leith Neighbourhood Partnership to cut their transport related CO2 emissions by 15%. More information about the activities of Greener Leith are available at www.greenerleith.org.

The Design Principles

Overall, Greener Leith welcomes the fact that the City of Edinburgh Council is keen to radically alter the design of the Picardy Place area, and supports the aspiration to develop a high quality public space, promote pedestrian uses, and enhance the 'city gateway' characteristics of the site.

Greener Leith believes that there are key elements that require greater consideration from the draft design principles document and these are set out below.

Picardy Place as an interchange

Greener Leith is pleased that the proposals recognise that Picardy Place is likely to become a vital transport interchange between different modes of transport. However, we note that no mention is made of bicycle storage facilities in the brief.

Currently, cycle storage facilities are located adjacent to the Omni centre. Greener Leith questions whether these facilities are sufficient, and whether they will be in the right place when the redevelopment of Picardy Place is completed. Cycle storage on Broughton Street is poor, and if the Tram stop is to run across the North of the site and Tesco's open a supermarket opposite the tram halt, there may be a good case to include cycle storage on this Northern edge too.

Consideration of the most convenient locations for cycle storage, and the volume of provision should be included in the design brief.

Picardy Place as a through route to and from the city

Greener Leith is currently conducting a travel survey of Leith residents' perceptions of various modes of travel. One of the emerging themes of the consultation is that many local residents perceive heavy traffic levels and a lack of dedicated cycle lanes as a significant disincentive to undertaking more journeys by bicycle.

Even Leith residents who regularly cycle cite the fact that there is not a 'safe route' to and from the city centre as one of the most significant barriers that prevents them from cycling more. Whilst the current proposals for the tram design will see the loss of advisory cycle lanes on Leith Walk, Greener Leith would hope to see dedicated cycle lanes installed from the London Road/Leith Walk junction northwards to Picardy Place as this is a key route into and out of the city. There is no practical alternative option for cyclists bound for Leith and East Edinburgh.

Therefore, if Edinburgh is to support the Scottish Government's stated aim of boosting cycling modal share to at least 10% of journeys, we contend that the draft design principles need to tackle this issue as one of the key issues that should be prioritised, alongside other sustainable transport modes.

This could mean incorporating some combination of dedicated cycle lanes and traffic light controlled junctions with advanced stop lines. The 'gyratory' approach proposed at present is not cycle friendly as it requires cyclists to cross lanes of moving traffic. This is not safe for cyclists, and because it will discourage cycle use, the design will do nothing to help the City of Edinburgh Council or the Scottish Government meet its aspirations to play a leading role in tackling climate change, tackle local air quality problems in the area or address the health inequalities that are apparent in Leith.

By contrast, the installation of dedicated cycle lanes has been shown to increase cycle use by up to 30%, bringing considerable health benefits, not just to those who cycle regularly, but also to local residents and pedestrians who will benefit from reduced air pollution.

We understand that in Denmark, the evidence suggests that every pound of investment in dedicated cycle lanes, five pounds are saved by the tax payer elsewhere – mainly in reduced health care costs. The absence of any mention of cycling infrastructure from the draft design principles therefore appears as a considerable missed opportunity.

Greener Leith welcomes design moves to improve the area to benefit pedestrians. However, we note in the indicative design proposals that the 'gyratory' design also means that pedestrians may need to do unnecessary 'traffic island hopping.' The design principles should aim to minimise the number of times pedestrians are required to 'island hop' and pedestrian waiting times, thus creating more 'liveable' streets.

Picardy Place as a public space

Picardy place can work much better as a public space and the commitment in the design brief to maintain key routes and views are welcomed. Public art should be used to 'animate' this high profile space and Greener Leith views the redevelopment of the site as an opportunity to consider whether the current artworks on the site should remain there, or whether there is an opportunity to include new public art works on the site.

Greener Leith proposes that the Paolozzi statues "The Manuscript of Monte Casino," are moved to the Kirkgate area of Leith. The 'Foot' sculpture should replace the unloved 'unicorn horn' at the Foot of the Walk. The remaining pieces should be used to create a Paolozzi/Gormley sculpture trail leading visitors from the Foot of the Walk, to the Shore area, where people will then be able to walk up river to find the Antony Gormley sculptures that are due to be installed along the banks of the Water of Leith.

Paolozzi was born only a stone's throw away from the Foot of the Walk, and we believe that 'bringing his sculptures home' would go a long way to contribute to the ongoing regeneration of the Kirkgate area.

In place of the Paolozzi statues, Greener Leith proposes that regular art work could be commissioned for the space, possibly making use of a 'empty plinth,' similar to arrangements that have been made in London to use the 'Fourth Plinth' in Trafalgar Square. This would provide a dynamic focus for the site, that could showcase the work of a whole range of artists.

Planting in the space should be designed so that it can be easily maintained, and does not produce areas with poor natural surveillance, or interfere with key view corridors. Planting should use native species wherever possible.

Contact

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