

George Street and First New Town Design Project – Consultation Response

Response by SEStran, January 2019

Link to consultation document:

<https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/george-street-and-first-new-town-design-project/>

'World Class' Street Setting

The concept design aims to enhance the environmental and heritage quality of the streets in the First New Town.

Views down George Street are enhanced through the removal of street clutter and central parking. The setting around the First New Town statues is designed to make their presence in the streets more prominent. Changes to the layout at junctions aim to make it easier to enjoy key views from the area back to the Old Town and over the Second New Town (north, towards the Firth of Forth).

4. To what extent do you agree with including the following elements of the concept design:

- Creating 'plaza' areas in the middle of each block of George Street to reinforce the views of key buildings and allow for informal crossing of the street mid-block.

Neither agree nor disagree.

- Changes to the layout of junctions to enhance the setting of statues within the First New Town.

Strongly agree.

- Changes to the layout at junctions to improve key views from the First New Town area

Strongly agree.

5. Is there anything that you wish us to consider, regarding the street setting of the area? Please comment in the box below.

While SEStran supports the idea of creating places to reinforce views of key buildings and allow for informal crossing of the street, SEStran would prefer to see that George Street is completely pedestrianised along with dedicated cycle provision. That way, public space is truly given back to the people, views of key buildings are reinforced, and pedestrians will be able to stroll around at their leisure. The creation of merely informal crossings means that cars will still have priority over pedestrians. If George Street is pedestrianised, however, buses would have to be diverted off George Street and (most likely) onto Hanover Street, Frederick Street, Princes Street and Queen Street, to keep the impact of such a diversion to a minimum. Regarding blue badge and resident parking, this could be provided on Hanover Street and Frederick Street, keeping easy access onto a pedestrianised George Street in place for those who need it most. There are numerous examples across the UK and beyond where pedestrianisation has worked and has boosted the economy. See for example Living Streets (2018) 'The Pedestrian Pound: The business case for better streets and places' available at <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/3890/pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf>. See also Future Place Leadership (2015) 'The effect of pedestrianisation and bicycles on local business: Case studies for the

Tallinn High Street Project' available at <https://futureplaceleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Tallinn-High-Street-Case-studies-Future-Place-Leadership.pdf>.

New Seating Areas With Small Scale Planting

Currently there is one public street bench in George Street, and feedback from prior consultation has suggested people would like more places to relax within the street. One of the new elements proposed in the concept design is the introduction of seating areas, set within small scale planted borders and hedges. These 'dwell zones' could also include some informal 'play' elements. These are designed to allow people to sit, rest, relax in the street.

6. To what extent do you agree with including the following elements of the concept design:

- Providing significantly more outdoor seating for people of all ages and abilities to use

Strongly agree.

- Using small scale planting (greenery) to create attractive, sheltered and human-scale setting for seating spaces

Strongly agree.

7. If you disagree, or would like us to consider anything further, please write in the box below.

N/a.

Street Trees

Prior consultation has shown support for greening within George Street. There are currently over 150 individual, uncoordinated elements of street greening in planters from flowers and shrubs to small trees on George Street. The draft concept design aims to bring more continuity to the approach to greenery on the street, and proposes the introduction of trees of an appropriate scale, species and density. This is important, so as not to detract from the heritage of the street or hide the historic skyline. It is proposed that the final choice of tree would be small, with small leaves and require minimum maintenance.

8. To what extent do you support the inclusion of some tree planting on George Street?

Strongly agree.

9. If you disagree, or would like us to consider anything further regarding trees, please write in the box below.

N/a.

Walking

The concept design aims to prioritise the movement of pedestrians. Wider, unobstructed footways are introduced, to make it much easier to walk in and through the First New Town. The design for the junctions of Charlotte and St Andrew Square, and Castle, Frederick, Hanover Streets with George Street aim to make pedestrian crossing safer, more direct, and easier.

The plaza spaces on George Street are also designed in a way that aims to support informal crossing in the middle section of blocks.

10. To what extent do you agree with including the following elements of the concept design:

- Proposed increases in pavement widths

Neither agree nor disagree.

- Significantly improved crossing facilities for pedestrians at junctions

Strongly agree.

Access by Bicycle

George Street and the First New Town area is a key destination for cycle trips. It is also a crucial 'connector' in Edinburgh's developing network of cycle routes.

National Cycle Route 1 runs along most of George Street. George Street also forms the central connection in the City Centre West East Cycle Link route, which connects Roseburn and the northern/western cycle network to Leith Walk and routes to Portobello and the east of the city. It also forms the end point of the developing Meadows to George Street project, connecting to the south of the city.

The concept design aims to provide safe and attractive cycling space that enhances the area's connecting role for cycling in the city, in a way that also enhances the overall environmental quality of the streets.

11. To what extent do you feel that the following elements of the concept design can improve the experience of accessing the area by bike?

- Dedicated, bi-directional cycleway on the south side of George Street adequately meets the needs of people on bicycles

Strongly agree.

- Continuing the defined cycleway space through junction areas will support safe interaction between all road users.

Strongly agree.

12. If there are other ideas, or things we should consider regarding accessing the area by bike, please tell us in the box below.

It is noted that the cycleway will be separated from the pedestrian zone by tactile paving. SEStran strongly welcomes the provision of segregated cycle paths. However, the delineation between the cycleway and pedestrian zone should be made extremely obvious to allow for safe and pleasant cycling, as well as to minimise the risk of accidents between cyclists and pedestrians. Tactile paving on its own is not enough to distinguish a cycle path from a footpath. A kerb would be the most effective way to delineate between the cycle path and the pedestrian zone. However, if tactile pavement is used instead of a kerb, this should be accompanied with other street elements, such as a different colour for the cycle path and logically placed street furniture and trees, to appropriately distinguish the cycle path from the pedestrian zone.

Access, Parking and Servicing

The concept design proposal focusses on ensuring the area remains accessible for those who need it most.

Servicing and access requirements for customers and businesses has been maintained as much as possible.

Bus stops throughout the First New Town have been retained in or close to their current locations, preserving public transport access within the streets.

Prioritised blue badge parking and shared loading and taxi bays at appropriate times of day allows for the provision and use of these spaces to be maximised, with a priority on blue badge parking on George Street and resident parking in side streets.

13. To what extent do you feel that the following elements of the concept design can improve the experience of accessing the area?

- The principle of prioritising blue badge parking on George Street, with resident and pay and display parking located in side streets.

Neither agree nor disagree.

- Removing central parking on George Street, to allocate more space for pedestrians within the street.

Strongly agree.

- Creating dedicated delivery and servicing areas on the north side of the street to retain an overall level of space that supports business activities

Neither agree nor disagree.

14. If there are other ideas, or things we should consider to balance access requirements, please tell us in the box below.

SEStran believes all cars should be removed from George Street. Blue badge parking and resident parking could be provided in side streets. Having dedicated parking bays for residents and blue badge holders on the side streets of George Street removes the need for road access through George Street itself. At the same time, residents and blue badge holders will still have easy and guaranteed access onto George Street. While loading services for businesses should still be allowed at appropriate times of the day, this can be provided without the need for a designated route for motor vehicles through George Street. The bottom section of Castle Street in Edinburgh (on the side of Princes Street) is a perfect example of a pedestrianised street where loading services are still allowed at certain times or where this is provided from side streets such as Rose Street South Lane.

15. What impacts on fairness and equality, if any, might result from introducing any of the ideas discussed previously?

SEStran believes the impact of pedestrianising George Street can be kept to a minimum by moving bus routes onto Princess Street, Queen Street, Hanover Street, and Frederick Street. Blue badge parking can be provided on the side streets of George Street, allowing for appropriate access to these pedestrianised areas by those who need it most. The maximum displacement for pedestrians would be limited to one block, such as from George Street to Hanover Street, which is a maximum walking

distance of around 300 metres. This is still within the recommended distance between bus stops of 400 metres.

16. Please use this space below for any other comments you would like us to consider.

George Street offers a great opportunity to follow the trend in other towns and cities worldwide of giving back public space to the people and disincentivising car use in urban areas. Pedestrianisation encourages active travel, such as walking and cycling, and promotes use of the public transport system. On top of that, there is plenty of research that shows the positive effects of pedestrianisation on businesses (see the reports referred to in question 5). Section 6.1 of the Regional Transport Strategy¹ (RTS) for the SEStran region also emphasises that “Good urban design can encourage more walking and cycling by creating a more favourable environment for these forms of travel and reducing the need to use cars in urban areas to access all types of activity. This complements specific policies for and provision of walking and cycling infrastructure, reflected in the policies and actions set out elsewhere in this RTS.” SEStran would therefore like to see more ambitious commitments to realising the key design objectives of the George Street and First New Town Design Project, such as suggested in this response.

¹ https://www.sestran.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SEStran_Regional_Transport_Strategy_Refresh_2015_as_published.pdf