

POLWARTH PAVEMENTS: AN IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

SUMMARY

1. The attached paper and accompanying slides outline an initiative to improve the appearance and pedestrian friendliness of a small part of MCC's area, through a community-based project involving a range of local stakeholders and supporters.
2. We invite comments from MCC members and seek their **approval in principle** to preparatory work on these proposals, through informal consultation with some of the key organisations who might become involved. We would report back to MCC at its November meeting with an update on those consultations; and offer a draft workplan.
3. We do not yet know if this project is feasible: that will emerge in due course when we start talking to people about it. But we are clear that, if it progresses, it should do so **under MCC's auspices**. It might proceed as a 'local place plan' in the sense described to us recently by Petra Biberbach; or it might take a different form. But, whatever the form or title, it would be good if we could demonstrate that a community council is equipped to initiate and progress a local area improvement project. At the very least, and even if tangible results take some time, residents will be more aware of MCC's interests and powers.
4. Down the line, it will be important to think about the **governance** of this project. It may need its own project board or team, to manage the inter-organisational relationships and inputs (including financial ones). But such a board could be answerable to MCC.
5. We are enthusiastic about the possibilities that could be opened up by the project. The upcoming bicentenary of the Union Canal, the possible creation of a new entry to the canal at Yeaman Place, plus the community benefit expected from the major canal-side development on Dundee Street – all of these suggest that **the time is right to push for some modest improvements to a neglected part of our area**. Grateful for your thoughts.

Declan Murray & Roma Menlowe

October 2021

Polwarth Pavements: Polwarth improvement project

Declan & Roma, June-August 2021

1. Motivation
 2. Context
 3. Action plan
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1. Motivation: Why street improvement in Polwarth?

- i. The spur for this discussion was the presentation by David Spaven of Living Streets (Edinburgh Group) to MCC on the poor 'streetscape' in and around the roundabout at the junction between Polwarth Gardens, Yeaman Place and Granville Terrace (MCC meeting 15th June 2021)¹. Relentless motor traffic (including commercial and HGV vehicles) along Yeaman Place, paucity of pedestrian crossing places, obstructive street signage and railings, broken pavements, and a shortage of green spaces – all contributed to a sense that the neighbourhood was neglected and the pedestrian environment deteriorating.
- ii. Further we recognised that Polwarth had not been included in any of the Travelling Safely (formerly Spaces for People) measures implemented in 2020-21.
- iii. At its 15 June meeting MCC recognised, as CEC affirms, that '*Pedestrians are at the top of the transport hierarchy*' and "hoped that many of Living Streets' recommendations would be implemented."

2. Context

- i. We noted that the **City of Edinburgh Council** (CEC) had recently made a number of key announcements signalling a 'greener' approach to neighbourhood development:
 - 'net zero by 2030' climate target
 - <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/climate-2/%E2%80%99re-meeting-net-zero-target>;
 - the City Mobility Plan 2021-30
 - <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/29320/city-mobility-plan-2021-2030-pdf>;

¹ The slides for David's presentation are due to be uploaded to the MCC website. The full report can be viewed here - <https://www.livingstreetsedinburgh.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Living-Streets-Polwarth-street-audit.pdf>.

- the City Plan 2030, <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cityplan2030>
- the City Centre Transformation Plan <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/roads-travel-parking/city-centre-transformation/1> - all these involve a high-level commitment to a future where people rather than cars dominate the transportation agenda.

ii. **Travelling Safely** (formerly Spaces for People) Wider policy developments suggested this might be a good time to consider neighbourhood uplift. We envisaged an integrated approach by a number of different organisations, working to a vision articulated by residents themselves and with accountability provided by the community council.

iii. Polwarth is also adjacent to a major development area centred on the **Union Canal** at Dundee Street. Housing (for students and residents), hotels, office and commercial developments, space for business start-ups and social enterprises, green spaces and an enlarged secondary school are all either underway or at advanced planning stage. The recently formed [Fountainbridge Blue Green Community Development Trust](#) – expresses the canal community’s desire to secure development gain for their locality arising from the major commercial and housing developments already underway at the waterfront. The Trust’s mission is to work with others ‘to support and strengthen opportunities for economic, environmental and cultural activity that benefit the community, and will promote social inclusion, sustainability and well-being.’ Strategy at a city development and locality level therefore seems favourable to neighbourhood regeneration projects, geared to improving amenity and pedestrian safety while promoting ‘green’ values.

iv. **Local Place Plans**, to be introduced later in 2021, are focused on small-scale locality development, community engagement, environmental values and well-being. They might also give a spur to ‘improvement projects’ of various kinds, but perhaps particularly in areas suffering from traffic congestion, pollution and loss of amenity. See <https://www.pas.org.uk/localplaceplans/>

v. The **Place Standard guidance** - see <https://placestandard.scot/guide/quick> offers useful tools for engaging with the local community and assessing, in a structured way, the strengths and weaknesses of any given area in relation to a broad range of parameters (eg traffic and parking; housing and community; identity and belonging). We thought that any plan for neighbourhood improvement in Polwarth should be incremental and locked into a vision developed by residents themselves. There would have to be consultation on priorities, methods, outcomes and funding. Consultation would not be one-off but a continuous process of listening and adapting.

vi. **Players, experts & other stakeholders:** Many organisations would have a role to play in any street improvement initiative. The City Council and its transportation advisers; local councillors; development agencies and commercial developers; community councils – those for Merchiston, Gorgie & Dalry, and Tollcross might all have an interest, depending on the precise boundaries of the area selected and cross-border impacts; charitable bodies such as Sustrans, the Fountainbridge Canalside Initiative (FCI) and the Fountainbridge Blue Green Community Development Trust (FBGCDT); neighbourhood bodies such as the North Merchiston Football Club, Friends of Harrison Park, Friends of the Union Canal, the social

enterprise Re-Union Canal Boats, significant facilities such as the North Merchiston Care Home; retailers and those with business premises; residents. Their interests, skills, resources and potential contributions would all have to be assessed. Other groups such as Net Zero Scotland, Transport Scotland and Spokes might also be interested to get involved as might local businesses, schools and individual residents.

vii. To get a project of any meaningful scale off the ground, **specialist advice** would most probably be required, especially in relation to traffic management, canal linkages, and the improvement of the streetscape. Some (limited) grant funding is available for option definition and feasibility studies. It would be essential to mobilise a significant degree of local involvement and support before commissioning specialist studies. This might also involve meeting with Isobel Leckie, leader of *The Causey* project in the southside of the city.

viii. Could it be tied in with **affordable housing development** at bottom of Temple Park Crescent (on site of Tiles shop)?

3. Action plan

- i. The precise **geographical scope** of such a project would need to be defined. It would be possible, perhaps desirable, to start with a modest area and use it as a test-bed for the kinds of engagement that would apply to any larger improvement project e.g.

focus on **the roundabout**

- mini-garden in the middle?
- additional Zebra Crossings on Polwarth Crescent and Granville Terrace
- removal of railings?
- widening of pavement outside 2-10 Polwarth Gardens

focus on **Walker Bridge**

- widening of walkway

focus on **Yeaman Place-Dundee Street junction**

- how to reduce traffic up the 'rat run' of Yeaman Place?

Starting with a well-defined area also has the advantage that it should be possible to show results and outcomes quite quickly and gauge public reaction. That would influence any subsequent initiatives.

- ii. It is likely that any project would fall into **stages**, with progress at each stage depending on local feedback and commitment. At a broader level, it would be important in the early stages of defining the project to take account of risks & vulnerabilities, impacts across different user/ resident groups (not all may benefit equally, especially if the project involves some restraint on traffic flows), planned and unplanned consequences, and the longer-term implications for local engagement.

Initial steps

None of this thinking is yet at the stage where a major decision would be required of a statutory body, such as a community council. All the same, it would be useful to know if the

CC to which we are both linked – MCC – would view positively an attempt on our part to sound out a few of the key players – such as local councillors, the FBGCDT, Planning Advice Scotland, and our colleagues in the Tollcross & Gorgie/ Dalry community councils. If such an early ‘listening exercise’ was thought useful, Declan & Roma would report back to MCC at its November 2021 meeting before taking these ideas any further.

Funding might also be available from the South East Community Grants Fund (next review panel for applications – December 2021)

Later steps

Outreach days

- One re. **roundabout**, outside Margiotta/Happy Vets (most space to stand there)
- One re. **canal access**, either outside former car parts shop OR at Fountainbridge Green
- One re. **Yeaman Place crossing**, either outside Sainsbury’s Dundee Street OR outside Fountain Park

Petition/resident survey

- Should follow outreach and try to distil priority proposals
- How to structure and administer?

Data collection exercise:

- Volume, type and speed of traffic
- Volunteer-run?

Engineer/architect study of the area

- Grant funded?

Artist’s impression of possible alternatives

- Also grant funded?

We will welcome Members’ and residents’ views at the meeting on 19 October. If MCC agrees in principle to further work, we will report back at the following meeting in November.