Polwarth Pavement Project

The Polwarth Roundabout

Progress Report February 2023

Merchiston Community Council

the site….

Polwarth Roundabout –overview

- purpose & scope of project
- MCC driven but community led

- how does the project respond to policy?
- what is the evidence for change?
- what are the proposals & recommendations?

What's the problem?

- *Living Streets* report on Polwarth pavements – spur to action
- safety issues for pavement users and cyclists at peak hours
- need to use (or lose) the 'local centre' – shops & services
- the 'rat-run' – volume & composition of traffic
- the risky route to school
- potholes and much more
- see it in pictures…..

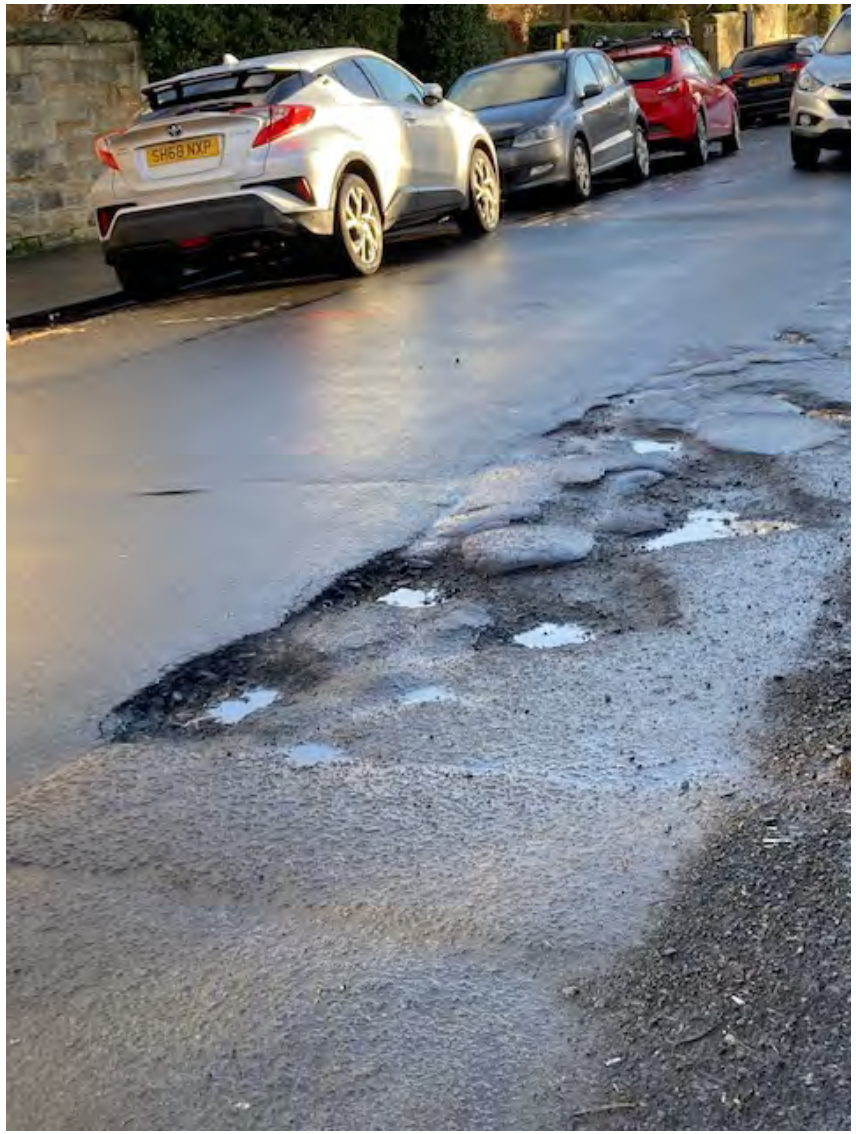
the drive-through roundabout..

poor sightlines for pedestrians

the 1980s zebra crossing…

our dilapidated phone box

condition of roads…



more dangerous driving

and again

One of many HGVs

Lorry jam on Yeaman Place

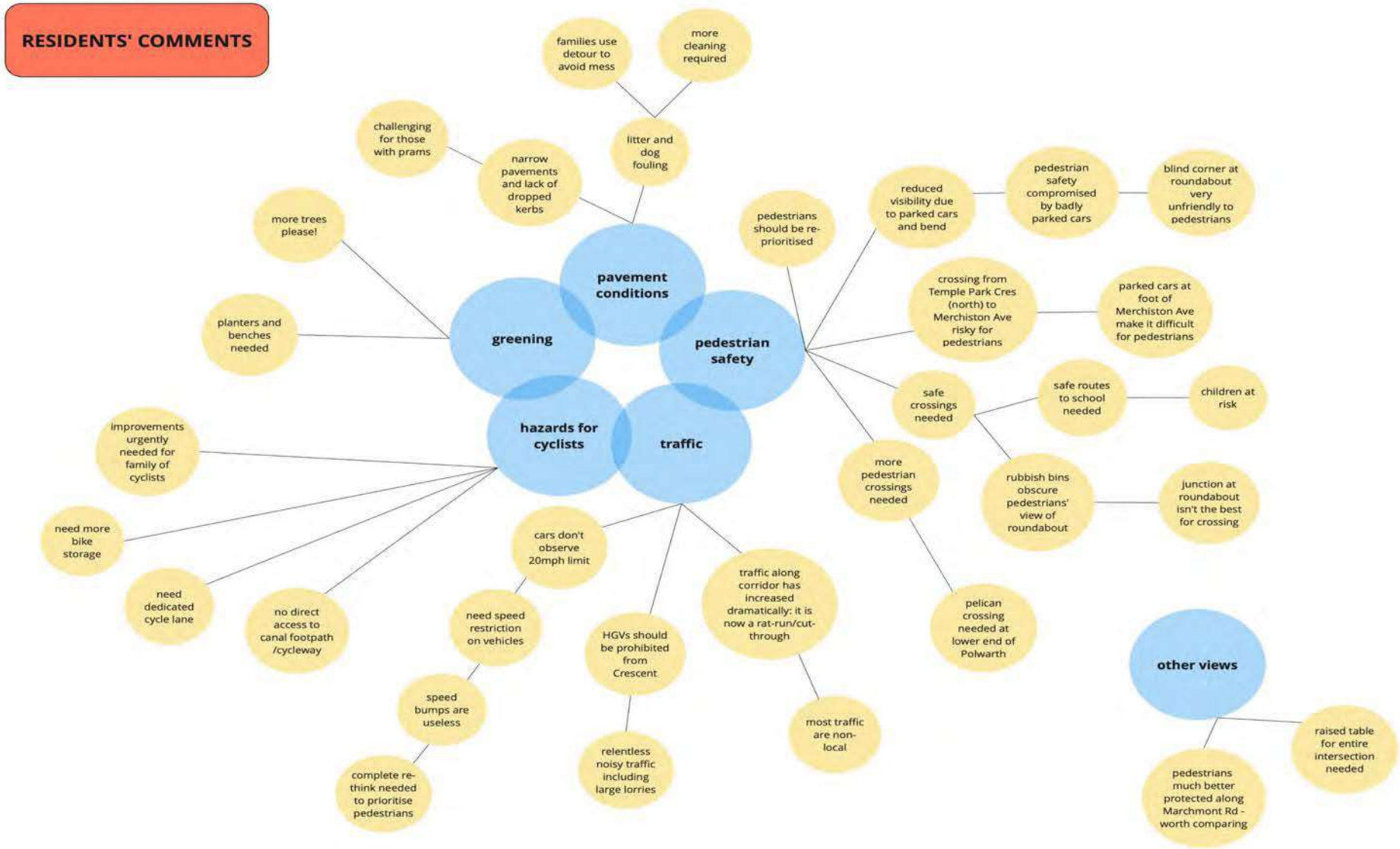
narrow pavements – hard for those with disabilities

Just popping to the shops….

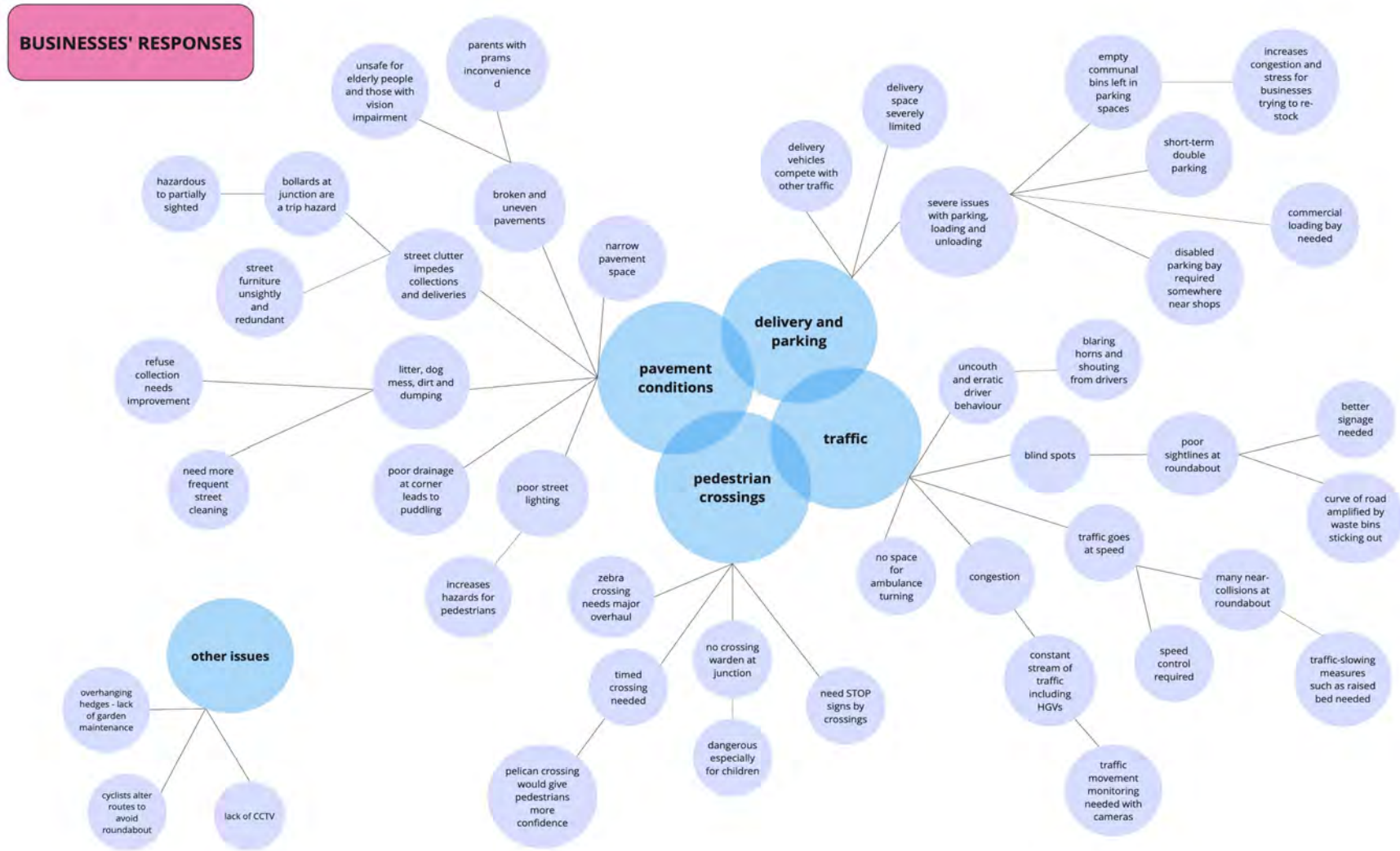
engaging with the community

- a process, not a single event
- took early soundings from Councillors, other community development bodies, and local people
- visited all businesses near roundabout – mind maps created
- conducted survey, leaflet & online, in November 2022
- webposts at each stage – 6 so far on MCC site
- progress reports sent to everyone on ‘contacts’ list
- further engagement in March on ‘visualisations’ of improvements
- lots of learning points

Early comments from residents



comments from business



Walkabout with councillors

Weekend street stall November 2022

What's the policy context?

- fundamental shift in thinking since 2000 about urban development, community sustainability & urban transportation
- planning, transport, street design, environment – policy in all areas must reckon with climate change & low carbon economy
- 2020 Scottish Government "Recovery Plan" endorsed concept of '20-minute neighbourhoods' & sustainable living
- CEC City Plan 2030 – big ambitions on net zero & elimination of poverty
- City Mobility Plan & Active Travel Action Plan – walking, wheeling & cycling the default modes of urban transport

policy context (2)

- The City Plan 2030 will ‘deliver a network of 20-minute walkable neighbourhoods’

- the lifelong health benefits of walking, wheeling and cycling will be realised by creating “streets and public spaces for people over cars”.

- commitment ‘to make Edinburgh a city…where the streets are for people not cars and with accessible and pleasant places to safely walk, wheel and cycle around.’

- the Polwarth ‘local centre’ – one of 63 across city

- “these [centres] contribute to the quality of life and sense of identity of neighbourhoods”

policy context (3)

City Mobility Plan says:

- “We need to put the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users first when designing streets.

- While most streets will accommodate car use, we need to achieve a much better balance, one where the street environment positively influences driver behaviour and where other street uses, and other forms of travel, especially journeys by foot, wheel or bicycle are prioritised over speed of movement by car.”

Remember the survey?

Polwarth Survey – the ‘lived experience’- key results

- high degree of consensus on key problems
- volume & speed of peak hour traffic – key concerns
- inadequate road crossings, despite closeness to schools
- no provision for cyclists
- pedestrians subordinated to vehicles (railings, narrow pavements)
- HGVs taking environmental toll
- local ‘vibe’ crushed by priority given to vehicles
- the rat-run
- deliveries to local shops and services

Residents' own words

- *"This terrible roundabout results in pedestrian and cyclists avoiding it completely and crossing at random places creating hazards in the wider area"*
- *"I try to drive home a different way, simply to avoid the roundabout"*
- *"The places where pedestrians cross near the [the roundabout] are a total terrifying mess and I am so stressed out every time I have to go near there with my 3- and 6-year-olds".*
- *'It's hard to cycle with children because of the speed of motor traffic, poor sight lines and lack of cycle paths.'*

Residents' own words (2)

- *Street clutter prevents easy access for wheelchair users…the curbs are not dropped low enough for wheelchair users' [at the foot of Merchiston Avenue]*
- *'My 70-year-old dad got knocked down on the zebra crossing 6 years ago'*
- *As a mother of 2 young children crossing the roundabout is extremely difficult: cars do not stop, park on double yellows to 'pop' to the shops, bins are obstruction to line of sight. Speed of traffic is too fast, heavy usage of the street at all times of day. No reduction of speed as cars approach the roundabout.*
- *'People don't treat it as a roundabout and cut over it. Working opposite it we see a lot of dangerous driving.*

Traffic counts – hard evidence

- important to test ‘lived experience’ against objective data
- commissioned traffic counts at all feeder routes; and pedestrian flows at all crossing points
- pedestrian numbers – children as well as adults - have significantly increased since last Council count in 2021
- counts also show very large volumes of vehicles on Polwarth Crescent, including HGVs
- clear evidence of speeding on Merchiston Avenue
- east/west axis data expected any day now & will be added to draft report
- road crossings – a matter of complex calculation
- strong case for revisiting the ‘ratings’ assigned by CEC to Polwarth crossings

View from Police Scotland

- Officer found clear evidence of dangerous driving, careless/ inconsiderate driving & illegal parking
- Layout of roundabout not helpful – intersection far too large, with uninterrupted vehicle sightlines
- Pinched intersection would be preferable
- Poor sightlines for pavement users also a cause for concern

CEC Active travel action plan

- “The majority of Edinburgh citizens live outside the city centre. An important aspect of the Active Travel Action Plan (ATAP) is supporting the creation of pleasant, people-focused residential streets and neighbourhoods”

- “Initiatives to help deliver safer and liveable neighbourhoods include:

  - continuing the rollout of lower speed limits; delivering safer streets and roads for all, especially walkers, wheelers and cyclists.
  - taking action to address ‘rat-running’ through residential areas via a prioritised ‘liveable neighbourhood’ programme.”

Outline proposals

- rare opportunity to be **ambitious** & plan for next 30 years
- getting to the roots of the problem: **traffic volume, traffic speed**
- need measures to arrest ‘rat-run’ and prioritise people & bus route
- focus on **safety** – for all pavement users and for cyclists
- **increase** the public realm – **pavements** – and decrease space for cars
- scrap roundabout and create **T junction,** with cycle apron
- better and **safer crossings** – crucial element in overall plan
- **supporting Polwarth** as a local centre – benches, greenery, appearance, cleanliness, bike parks & hangars

Next steps

- all survey evidence analysed
- landscape architect preparing ‘visualisations’ – what change would look like
- draft report will circulate within community and to councillors in March: all data open to view
- all proposals linked to CEC policy commitments in City Mobility Plan & City Plan 2030
- MCC keen for dialogue with CEC & ready to seek contributions from other funders

Why this project matters

- high level policy commitments to net zero, active travel, and 20-minute neighbourhoods
- but will they be translated into real change at neighbourhood level?
- vital to **ensure safety** for pavement users and cyclists – they hold the key to a sustainable future for communities
- MCC will offer these proposals to CEC as a ‘demonstration’ project – an example of what can be achieved when the community and Council work together
- ‘thank you, MCC, for trusting our comments’