

EACC Meeting: 27 June 2024.

Session 2: Led by Roma Menlowe and Vanessa Meadu, from Merchiston Community Council.
Long-term residents of Polwarth.



A project spanning road safety, active travel and neighbourhood renewal.
Spring 2022 inception.
Report to CEC June 2023.
A tale of elation and deflation, of highs and lows.

Presentation outline		
The Polwarth Pavements Project	overview	Where do we go from here? challenges and lessons learnt so far are our efforts in the right place? what should be CCs' role in community development? How to enable this?
	our story – in brief	
	our vision for a safer neighbourhood	

The project & where we are now



“We are now anxiously awaiting the outcome of a bid that we have made into the City Council’s new local traffic improvement programme” (RM)

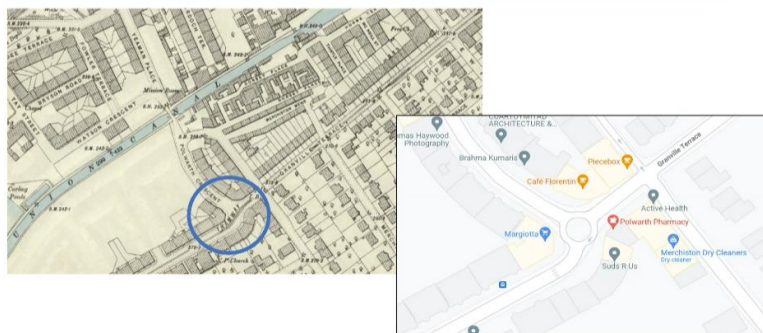
The site is one of 60+ ‘local centres’ identified in City Plan 2030, helping the creation of 20-minute neighbourhoods.

It is a pivotal intersection, carrying a bus route, walking and cycling routes to Bruntsfield Primary and Boroughmuir High Schools, and a (commercial) traffic ‘rat run’ between Dalry and Colinton.

the site....



Location, location..



Impetus: Edinburgh Living Streets – study 2021



Uncontrolled crossings, cars don't slow down



Pavement clutter, narrow pavements



Guardrails encourage speeding; no cycle parking



Pavement clutter; an unattractive place to linger

Roma Menlowe (External)

'Living Streets' and problems faced by pedestrians: narrow pavements; pavement clutter; ineffective guard rails; the dominance of motor traffic.

MCC's early steps

- preliminary soundings to confirm issues & political support
- informal consultations with Ward Councillors, community development bodies, schools and local people
- visited shops & businesses near roundabout
- wrote to CEC officers, but no dialogue opened
- supportive views bolster successful bid for CEC community grant of £3,795

Scope the project; take local soundings; engage with residents, local businesses and road users. Build big photo library of awful driving, terrible parking, hazards for children and anxious crossing.

Initial comments from residents centre on:

Pavement conditions / delivery and parking / pedestrian crossings / traffic

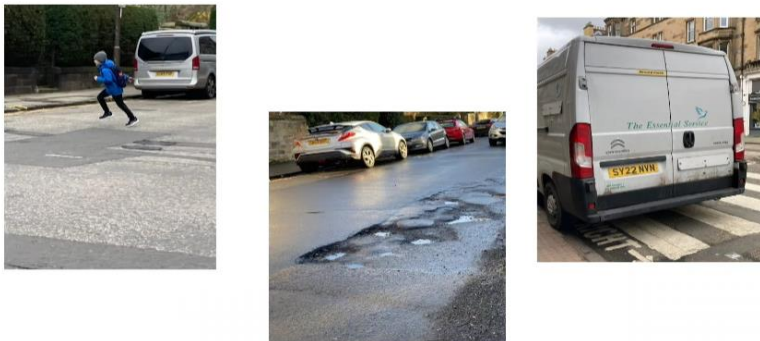
Initial comments from business centre on:

Pavement conditions / delivery and parking / pedestrian crossings / traffic.

Core concerns - pedestrian & cyclist safety, speeding, rat-run, amenity



The risky route to school...



policy context – favourable to integrated local solutions

- The City Plan 2030 will ‘deliver a network of 20-minute walkable neighbourhoods’
- commitment ‘to make Edinburgh a city...where the streets are for people not cars.....’
- “these [local centres] contribute to the quality of life and sense of identity of neighbourhoods”

The concept of improvement fit with active travel and road safety policy at every level; national, city, local.

project launch: the method and the means

- **Method** - consultative, exploratory, data-driven
- **Means** – a ‘micro’ team of 2, plus a lot of help from MCC’s friends.
- **Expert help** commissioned from
 - Planning Aid Scotland (PAS)
 - Traffic Management consultants
 - Landscape architect – Urban Pioneers

Expert help essential. “We would have failed miserably without help from (these) key allies.” (RM)

consultation & community engagement



Local engagement: how?

Leaflets / postcards / formal survey / web-posts for news, feedback, motivation / street events with local Councillors in attendance / dialogue with local supporters and stakeholders / regular exchanges with Councillors to build support from that quarter / positive engagement with Police Scotland / community survey using Google Forms (offering ‘live’ feedback as the survey built up) / monthly update at Merchiston CC’s public meetings.

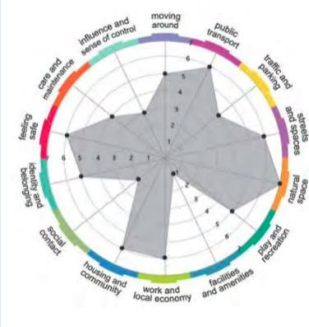
“Getting engagement with your community is one thing. Appreciating it and keeping it are equally important, and these are the hard parts.” (RM)

Community survey – ‘soft’ data



- Survey on paper & by Google form
- 165 responses from households representing 348 adults & 113 children
- Over 800 individual responses to 8 questions in survey
- Strong support for integrated measures to improve safety, reduce speeding, promote active travel, interrupt rat-run & enhance amenity and community ‘vibe’

analysing the survey responses – a nifty tool



The Place Standard – the key analytical tool

- digital tool that helps interpret how residents think and feel about their environment
- builds a picture of features that communities value, what they want to change, and why
- coded over 800 separate items of feedback from survey, plotted against key features of the tool
- enables joined-up thinking about locality problems

This is a “very handy tool ... It’s important for community councils to know about such analytic tools, their value and limitations.” (RM)

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.

Building the evidence base – ‘hard’ data

- commissioned traffic counts
- measured pedestrian & cycle flows at main crossing points
- hard data confirmed residents’ concerns



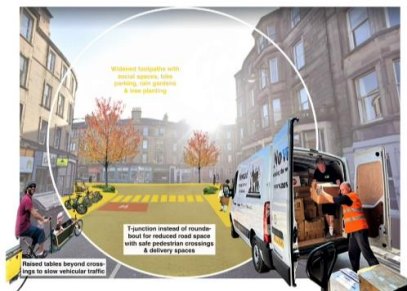
Important to test ‘lived experience’ of resident feedback against objective data.

key technical supporters

- PAS advised MCC on survey design & on analysis of results, using Place Standard
- Traffic consultants provided objective, confirmatory evidence
- Landscape architect showed what change might look like – crucial part of building support for final recommendations
- thrifty team - £3k not yet exhausted!

Report – June 2023

- integrated solutions for complex problems
- compliant with CEC strategy
- options for low-cost, phased approach
- joined-up solutions



We reported in June 2023 to CEC (120 pages, available online). “We focused on integrated solutions for complex problems and on compliance with strategy and policy at all levels. We have offered phased and low cost approaches to implementation.” (RM)

Handover to Vanessa Meadu.

What happened next?

report dissemination and immediate reactions

- Welcomed by residents and stakeholders
- Councillors supportive in principle but lack clout
- tepid response from CEC officers; no proactive engagement

A “senior Council officer for place-making” concluded at a meeting that CEC “would struggle to find an appropriate work-stream in which to place this project, so we didn’t get too much of a firm support in the end from that discussion.” (VM)

success factors and struggles



- getting good advice at right time
- community & stakeholder response
- stretching our collective skills – see report's 'learning points'
- support from MCC Chair



- challenge/ resource mismatch
- team changes & resilience
- feeling excluded from CEC thinking

“... the feeling is often that we are operating in some kind of a void in relation to CEC thinking. We feel very excluded from what’s actually being decided and happening on the ground despite our best efforts”. (VM)

beautiful plans but no clear entry point

The collage includes several key documents:

- 20 minute neighbourhood:** A report by Transport Scotland with the slogan "Living well locally".
- Our Future Streets (Circulation Plan):** A Technical Summary Report from The City of Edinburgh Council, dated January 2024.
- Local Place Plans:** A report from the Transport and Environment Committee, dated 10am, Thursday, 25 April 2024, titled "Local Traffic Improvement – Programme Proposal and Assessment Criteria".
- City Plan 2030:** A "Progress plan" from Transport Scotland.
- Major Junctions Review Update:** A report from the Transport and Environment Committee, dated 10am, Thursday, 20 April 2023.

“... we are still unclear one year later what the entry point is for a middling-sized project like ours that aims for integrated change. ... there’s little evidence of joined-up consultative locality-based planning”.

stops and starts 2023-2024

- hopes of Sustrans funding dashed
- the debacle of recent 'pavement resurfacing'
- the new *local traffic improvement programme*
- Where do we go from here?



optimism must live!



“... our hopes are now pinned on the new local traffic improvement programme, but we don't know what is going to happen. ... two years later... we have no clue how any of our proposals ... will be resourced or adopted”. (VM)

broader issues for community councils

- what is/ should be community council role in local development?
- what needs to change to enable such a role?
- can a volunteer body deliver for its community?



The Community Council role in local development. How do you get initiatives going? Are community councils well placed to start up, carry out and secure implementation of development proposals?

What role does development planning play?

What would need to change to equip Community councils for a developmental role?

It's really triggered a lot of these kinds of questions.

Your views, please!

What is the future for community-led joined-up initiatives?

How do other CCs engage with CEC? With what results?

What could we have / can we do differently, or better?

Activism and community councils: what are the limits?