



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Headline Thought-pieces:
A Civic conversation about our urban future

The Residential City

The Prosperous City

The Connected City

The Expanding City

The Heritage City

thecockburnassociation

May 2019



For everyone who loves Edinburgh

The Cockburn Association was founded in 1875 to promote and encourage the care and conservation of Edinburgh's unique architectural and landscape heritage. The Association is one of the oldest conservation, planning and architectural advocacy organisations in the world. It takes its name from Lord Cockburn (1779-1854), a renowned Scottish lawyer, judge and literary figure, who can claim to be one of Scotland's first conservationists. His 1849 publication *A Letter to the Lord Provost on the Best Ways of Spoiling the Beauty of Edinburgh* provided the inspiration to establish a popular organisation and it remains as relevant today as when it was first penned.

Amongst its activities are Doors Open Days Edinburgh, the hugely popular annual event enabling people to visit buildings not usually accessible to the public.

It is headquartered in a small office in Trunk's Close in the historic Old Town, forming part of Moubray House which the Cockburn saved from demolition in 1910. It maintains a small professional office.

The Cockburn Association's objectives are to promote and encourage the following objects by charitable means but not otherwise:

- i. the maintenance, improvement and promotion of the amenity of the City of Edinburgh and its neighbourhood;
- ii. the protection, preservation and conservation of the City's landscape and historic and architectural heritage.

thecockburnassociation

Trunk's Close, 55 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 3QB

0131-557-8686

www.cockburnassociation.org.uk

ouruniquecity@cockburnassociation.org.uk

admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk

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Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Introduction:

A Civic conversation on our urban future

The past quarter century has seen considerable growth in Edinburgh – in population, tourism and festivals, commercial development, public transport networks and higher education, but also in congestion, air pollution, housing pressure, and commercialisation of open space.

During that same period, the ethos and culture of the Scottish planning system and its application in Edinburgh has also changed. Ironically, while the rhetoric of “sustainability” has become ubiquitous, short-termism and prioritisation of private commercial interests have called the tune. Planning the city as an exercise in civic responsibility and public benefit seems to have been made subordinate to process, box-ticking and performance management.

The City of Edinburgh Council will soon begin consulting on an update of the Local Development Plan for the city, now known as City Plan 2030. Some parameters have already been aired. Continued growth in student numbers is advocated, contributing to an overall increase in the city’s population by 28% over the next few decades. The tourism strategy aspires to grow the number of visitors by half as much. The Scottish Government sees Edinburgh as the prime economic magnet for the country, supporting a philosophy of quantitative growth. “Predict and provide” appears to be the default response of policy makers.

However, as Lewis Mumford, American historian and author of *The City in History* put it, “trend is not destiny”.

A Crisis in numbers

In a BBC report “*Housing crisis: are cities unaffordable?*” that appeared online on 30 April 2019, between 2010 and 2018 Lothian region, including Edinburgh, saw a 39.8% rise in the average private rent for a one-bedroom property; a 42.3% increase for two-bedrooms; and 46.6% for three-bedrooms, according to Scottish government figures.

A report by property experts Grants in 2018, which appeared in *The Times*, said “In Edinburgh, curiously 75% of buyers are from outside Scotland. Either Edinburgh investors are going elsewhere or they are being beaten to it by outsiders. In the last 12 months, there has been an increase of over 30 per cent of buyers from London or overseas and we expect this growth to continue.” The article also reported that the number of England-based landlords registered with Scotland’s leading tenancy organisation had risen from 260 in 2012 to 1,388 in 2017. It goes on to say, “This has compounded fears that investors are pushing first-time buyers out of the market, especially in popular areas such as Easter Road and Leith Walk where prices have risen by as much as 33% in a year.”

The exponential growth of short-term holiday lets, powered by the disruptive technology company Airbnb has added to challenges. Another BBC report (*What the Airbnb surge means for UK cities*, 29

April 2018, BBC news web pages), indicated that listings have doubled in Edinburgh since 2016, rising fastest during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. It goes on to say that just over 12,000 properties are listed in Edinburgh, but the effect is greater than in London as this accounts for a much bigger proportion of the city's property and population. Greatest pressure is within the World Heritage Site, with the Old Town taking the biggest hit.

What are the links behind these figures? Increased foreign and out-of-Scotland investment in residential property; significant inflation on traditional tenancy rents; exponential increase in short-term letting, mostly for tourism or non-residential purposes. Added to this the significant expansion of student residences and hotels, it is hard not to see a crisis in identity.

What Next?

The future of the city is in the balance. The Cockburn Association has initiated Our Unique City to help to inform and trigger discussion amongst citizens and stakeholders about the future of our city, generating evidence and ideas for the planning and management of development.

We describe this paper as a "*Thought-piece*" to kick-start this process. With a preamble on Edinburgh as an International and National City, the following five inter-related papers have been outline some of the issues and ask a number of questions. The Residential city considers housing and living environments and the challenges in providing (and maintaining) high quality places; The Prosperous City outlines issues in carbon reduction and economic expansion in the face of inequality and a speculative land economy. The Connected City ponders transport and digital platforms, considering how the city functions in an age of disruptive technologies and digital/AI innovations; The Expanding City considers the impact of physical growth on the land and amenity; finally, The Heritage City outlines the characteristics in heritage, landscape and form that identifies the city and its neighbourhoods.

We hope that each theme will generate discussion and debate. Over the course of 2019, we plan to host seminars, workshop sessions to draw on evidence from residents and experts alike, to set out the issues, review current policy and practice, and conclude with recommendations for policies and actions. In doing so, we hope it will:

Firstly, it will provide a vehicle to capture Civic opinion on a number of key areas of interest affecting local communities directly. In doing so, it will be an evidence-based approach, seeking to inform and educate communities on key matters, enabling them to participate effectively in the city building process.

Secondly, it will provide a much broader avenue of participation through the use of outreach channels such as Facebook and Twitter. This will capture segments of society, including a younger audience, to engage into the process and share information through their own networks, democratising the debate.

Thirdly, it will enhance the ability of local communities to think about their own needs and aspirations, by providing a forum for discussion that connects with other communities and individuals. This will then enable local communities to generate their own debate for their own purposes.

Finally, it will provide a useful participative network and information source for government and other organisations who would value a wider civic input to their areas of interest and activity.

The papers have been authored by members of the Cockburn Council. Our thanks go to:

Chairman of Council Professor Cliff Hague OBE - Professor Emeritus of Planning and Spatial Development at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Past President of the Royal Town Planning Institute and of the Commonwealth Association of Planners and past Chair of Built Environment Forum Scotland.

Stephen Hajducki - Chartered Architect and Town Planner with a strong grounding in urban design, placemaking and conservation.

Duncan Campbell – Landscape Architect with extensive experience with the Forestry Commission where he was Head of Environment, the Countryside Commission for Scotland as Director, Scottish Natural Heritage as Director of Communications and as Director of the Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust Ltd amongst other appointments.

Helpful criticism has been provided by Andrew MacLeod, Vice-Chairman of Council (a former professional economist in the civil service holding a range of senior civil service policy and managerial positions. His work experience included employment and skills policy; welfare to work; regional and business development; fisheries protection and enforcement; and healthcare quality and regulation), Assistant Director James Garry (Chartered Environmentalist and Chartered Planner with a professional career with several Scottish local authorities and Public Bodies specialising in sustainability, carbon and climate issues) and Director Terry Levinthal (an Urban Designer and Conservation Professional with over 25 years' experience in public and charity organisations as a senior Executive and Non-Executive Director) who also acted as editor.



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Preamble

Edinburgh's international and national context

Summary and the way ahead

Edinburgh, with its economy strongly based on knowledge, tourism and finance, has been able to prosper over an extended period, in part because of its legacies from its past. These continue to be important but also are backed by innovation. The city cannot stand still. Public policy makers have recognised that Edinburgh and its region are critical to Scotland's economy and have sought above all to grow the region. However, the future is uncertain, and it would be wrong to assume that present trends can simply be extended forwards. There remain significant challenges in respect of infrastructure and housing that could prompt skilled mobile young people to move elsewhere. In addition, issues of inequality, climate change and environmental protection, while being recognised in public policy have received less attention and weight than the pursuit of GDP.

How can action at city and city-region level deliver on these urgent matters?

Background

Edinburgh is frequently rated highly, nationally and internationally, on a range of measures, such as quality of life, economic strength, attraction of visitors etc. Such success owes something to the city's favourable legacies of assets and liabilities but also to actions and policies since the 1980s. In looking forward it is important to understand this recent past, but also to recognise the pace, disruptive, discontinuous and global nature of change today. The Cockburn Association is launching Our Past, Our City, Our Future as a way of generating informed debate from civic society about the planning and management of the city, because we feel that Edinburgh has reached a critical point in its long history. In a series of papers and discussions we raise critical local issues. However, the scope for local action is framed at national and international levels. This paper sketches some of the main external forces that are impacting on Edinburgh.

A city of learning in a knowledge economy

Heavy industry was never central to Edinburgh's economy. So the city did not suffer in the 1970s and 1980s in the way that some other major UK urban areas and places around Edinburgh did: for example, coal mining was closed down in Fife and the Lothians, while a major truck and tractor plant was closed in Bathgate. Edinburgh, with its universities and financial sector was exceptionally well placed to make the transition to an information society and knowledge economy. Key steps were taken in public policy that helped the city to capitalise on these advantages, and the competitive advantages offered by research-led clusters of related businesses. The BioQuarter, led by the development of the Royal Infirmary and the University of Edinburgh's Queen's Medical Research Institute is an example. Similarly, the traditional prestige of an Edinburgh address for the financial services sector has been retained as the advent of cabling was negotiated by office development in the Lothian Road area. Building on this we are now seeing strong growth in "fintech".

Traditional higher education providers, a key sector of the Edinburgh economy, are already being impacted by digital learning, and the global opportunities and threats that it offers. While this may not spell the end of the traditional face-to-face teaching that concentrates students and staff spatially, extrapolations of the future of higher education and student mobility need to be treated with some caution. For example, mixed reality technologies, e.g. using 3D holograms, may make “hands-on” learning available in remote locations, intensifying global competition.

Growth in tourism

There has been strong growth in tourism and hospitality in Edinburgh. This reflects Edinburgh’s traditional strengths in the field, but also global trends: tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing sections of the world economy, and one that was least hit by the 2008 financial crisis. Tourism is also changing; not only is there the steep growth in demand from China and other East Asian countries, but other innovations have impacted. For example, the growth of budget airlines, a phenomena almost unknown 20 years ago, has boosted short-stay trips to urban centres. In addition platform businesses such as Airbnb have created new ways of doing tourism. Other factors, over which the sector has little control, add to the uncertainty, e.g. the volatility of currency exchange rates or concerns over security.

While tourism continues to be an industry with a chronic skills shortage, and a tradition of low pay, the future may not be simply the same as the past, but with ever increasing numbers. Destinations are seeking to respond to the increasing interest in “authenticity”, as part of the visitor experience. and This may lead to an increasing differentiation in what places offer, with niches standing apart from pursuit of mass tourism. The OECD in its 2018 report on tourism trends and policies urged governments to “encourage more responsible business practices through the integration of environmental and social criteria into tourism policies and programmes.” This points to new opportunities for a city like Edinburgh, e.g. in developing and disseminating green financing instruments, or innovations in design, management and regulation to more equitably share the costs and benefits of tourism.

Cities and mobility

Globally cities are growing because they provide better opportunities than rural regions – for businesses, education, and those seeking jobs. This is a consequence of the growing importance within an information society of what are called “agglomeration economies” – the benefits that flow from access to skilled labour, capital and new ideas within a large urban centre. As discussed above, Edinburgh has benefited from this dynamic, while a further consequence has been the increasing interdependence between the city and the places that surround it but lie beyond the administrative boundary. The city region has become a functional reality.

Like most cities, Edinburgh’s population has grown through net inward migration, and not just through natural increase. The migrants come from elsewhere in Scotland, the rest of the UK and from many other countries. Here as elsewhere, they tend to be younger and skilled. The converse of this reality is that the city needs also to be able to retain its own young people who are themselves mobile and will look also to London or abroad to further their education and careers.

The National Records of Scotland projections for 2014-2039 anticipated that Edinburgh would see a population increase of 21%, while that for Midlothian would be 26% (the highest rate of growth in Scotland) and 18% for East Lothian. Nevertheless, Edinburgh remains a small city by international, or even purely European, standards. Notwithstanding the completion of the Queensferry Crossing, the infrastructure connecting Edinburgh to Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen does not enable the four city regions to function as one polycentric region of over two million.

Public policy

The Scottish Government has committed to supporting the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals 2016-30. These include urgent action on climate change and its impacts, reducing inequalities within and between countries and making cities safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable. The Government's National Performance Framework has now been aligned to these internationally agreed goals, with the declared overall purpose being "To focus on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth". Amongst the Outcomes sought are protection and enhancement of the environment, communities that are safe, empowered, resilient and inclusive, and a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy.

National Planning Framework 3 (2014) gives spatial expression to the government's economic strategy for development across Scotland over a 20 to 30 year timeframe. It pointed to growth in the Edinburgh region. It acknowledged the gateway role of Edinburgh Airport, but highlighted the need for strategic, cross-boundary transport infrastructure improvements to unlock sites to accommodate housing.

The proposed city-region Strategic Development Plan is awaiting Ministerial approval which had been expected before the end of 2018. Key elements of the plan are proposals that over the next 20 years, most growth will take place in and around Edinburgh and in "indicative Long Term Growth Corridors". The City of Edinburgh is planned to take a larger proportion of the region's new housing than in previous plans, to help minimise commuting by car and make best use of existing infrastructure. The plan reasserts the role of Green Belts. However, there is concern that the frequent policy references to "sustainable", in practice, often do not conform with the original Brundlandt definition (Our Common Future 1983) that sustainable development must not endanger the environment (natural and cultural heritage).

In 2018 a City Region Deal was agreed between the Scottish Government, UK Government and the SES Plan member authorities. It is basically a £600M public investment programme that promotes economic growth. The funds will go directly to scientific research on space, health sciences, agri-tech and food and drink at Heriot-Watt, Queen Margaret and Edinburgh Universities, as well as for the new concert hall. The investment is welcome, but it appears as disjointed collection of projects rather than a coherent programme aimed at addressing the wider city needs.

It is within this background of policy and government ambition that Edinburgh's future needs to negotiate. Edinburgh is to be the growth magnet of Scotland – a positive and welcome position. It does bring challenges and brings to the fore choices that need explicit examination.



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Paper one: The Residential City

Background

Prosperity, a strong economy and the quality of the city as a place to live have made Edinburgh's housing market strong and resilient over the past 30 years. The Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 3 identified the South-East of Scotland as a major location for growth. The proposed strategy in the Strategic Development Plan for this region currently awaits decision from the Scottish Government. It seeks to concentrate strategic growth within or close to existing settlements. This is intended to improve access to jobs, services, and facilities (including open space), reduce the need to travel by car and protect the countryside.

The issue of the expansion of Edinburgh, and its relation other settlements in the city region is being addressed in a separate paper. The purpose of *The Residential City* is to look beyond the housebuilders' advocacy on housing numbers which has captured the focus of our planning system. Instead, we seek to explore qualitative concerns about the type of housing and neighbourhoods, and the necessary facilities that make a good place to live. These are matters that the revision of the Local Development Plan needs to address. That Plan will set out policies that should strongly influence decisions planning applications for years to come and will also be a reference point for Local Place Plans prepared at community level and proposed in the Scottish Government's Planning Bill. The work stream on *The Residential City* therefore aims to collect evidence from which to produce a robust set of policy recommendations that should inform the local planning process and provide support for civic society organisations in the city and elsewhere as they seek to shape the quality of the places where they live.

Whose city? Provision of Housing for all

Edinburgh has become an expensive place to live. Homes for Scotland, which represents housebuilders, says that Edinburgh is the least affordable city in Scotland, with average house prices 6.12 times the average earnings. Rented accommodation has also become increasingly expensive. Scottish Government data showed that rents for 2-bedroom accommodation in Lothian had increased by 33% between 2010 and 2017, far outstripping inflation and more than anywhere else in Scotland.

"Affordable housing" takes many forms from traditional social renting to mid-market rents, shared ownership and discounted sales. The need for more affordable housing is widely accepted, the challenge is how to provide for it. Like other authorities Edinburgh relies substantially on seeking developer's contributions from private development to support affordable housing provision. The planning authority operates a policy which states that "Planning permission for residential development, including conversions, consisting of 12 or more units should include provision for affordable housing amounting to 25% of the total number of units proposed. For proposals of 20 or more dwellings, the provision should normally be on-site." Housing associations are often involved in building and managing the affordable element.

Much of the land on which housing will be built in the 2020s already has planning permission, and development will only take place when, and on conditions acceptable to the big house building companies. This is a feature of a speculative land economy. It means that it can be very difficult to get the scale of affordable housing the city needs. Thus, the key question for has to be whether **more ambitious and demanding targets for affordable housing should be set on new planning permissions? It also begs the question, should we seek to decouple this policy stance that makes affordable housing depend on the implementation of private development?**

This is urgent as there are large sites in the city likely to be the subject of major planning applications soon, as publicly owned land is sold to developers, for example Astley Ainslie and Redford Barracks.

Whose city? Loss of affordable housing

Policies have failed to prevent the loss of housing, affordable and otherwise, to Short-term Holiday Lets (STHL) as platforms such as Airbnb arrived, which has seen the market in unregulated short-term rentals mushroom. The pace of change is such that the scale is almost impossible to quantify. However, as the report from our 2018 Conference, *The AirBnB Phenomenon: Impact and Opportunities of the Collaborative Economy and Disruptive Technologies: How Should Edinburgh respond to short-term letting* showed, there is plenty of evidence that this has now become a serious issue in Edinburgh. Quite simply, the rental income that can be extracted from short-stay visitors exceeds that from long-term tenants, and the obligations on the property owner are much less.

There are also issues of amenity, particularly in tenement properties. While “party flats” can be an obvious nuisance, they are not the only concern. Unknown faces on the stair can reduce a sense of security; tracing owners for common repairs becomes more problematic, undermining good maintenance; noise and damage can be caused as heavy suit cases are dragged up and down; and the local grocery shops can become retailers of “tourist tatt”. The problems are most severe in the Old Town and Leith, but by no means confined to those areas.

Escalation of student housing is also eroding the stock of affordable housing. Again, the market incentive is very simple: higher rents and less onerous requirements. The growth of student numbers and within that of overseas students at our higher education institutions, together with competition to attract them by the quality of the “student experience” on offer has created the demand. However, in this digital age and with changing labour markets and a growing “gig economy” where temporary, flexible jobs are commonplace, is this model of higher education really sustainable?

In the face of these pressures, **what policies should be in place to protect the existing stock of affordable housing? What do we need to do to increase the rate of development of affordable housing?**

Placemaking and sustainable development

Part of the price of reliance on major UK-wide housebuilders to provide new neighbourhoods in and around Edinburgh has been the loss of distinctive character. New housing environments are too often mundane, and pay insufficient attention to well-being and sustainable mobility. It is so much easier and less risky to lay out another estate of standard “luxury executive” house types that consumers have been groomed to expect. A recent report in England highlighted concern of houses being built in locations where a private car is the only realistic means of transport. These are characterised by very low densities with wide roads, driveways, garages and parking areas, but skimping on open space with houses crammed onto minimal plot sizes. As Council finance has been squeezed, planning departments have been expected to negotiate developer contributions for infrastructure and social facilities. Edinburgh currently sets out what it expects in relation to a list of

different zones in the city. However, this begs many questions about quality of provision and future maintenance: in many cases, it is simply a matter of setting a price which the developer can then seek to negotiate around. **How well is this system working: is it producing the kind of development we want?**

In the autumn of 2018 the City Council held a public consultation on “placemaking”. While welcome, it was led by a focus on transport rather than planning and design. Some of the issues are addressed in the paper on *The Connected City*, but successful placemaking should include a wide range of issues, not least with trees and the natural environment, conservation of environmental assets and landmarks, reuse of existing building, and future adaptability of places. A holistic approach to sustainability is needed. Meanwhile, satnav’ and Google maps are steering drivers through neighbourhoods offering the “shortest route” to a destination. **Do we need new policy initiatives such as “low traffic neighbourhoods”? How can these important principles be embedded in the development plan and be enforced?**

The UK has some of the smallest homes in Europe. Analysis from Sellhousefast.uk found the average three-bedroom home in England measured 88m². This is 5m² smaller than the recommended minimum of 93m². By way of comparison, the Netherlands and Germany—both of which have dense populations—average at 115.5m² and 109.2m², respectively. Denmark boasts the largest floor space, with the average property measuring 137m². As most large-scale housebuilders use standardised plans, this trend is evident in Edinburgh. Cost is of course a factor, but the need to provide a reasonable amount of internal space is essential. Such standards were put in place in the 1960s but were seen as a barrier to development so abolished in the 1980s. **Should we advocate for a minimum space standards for new housing, akin to the 1963 Parker Morris standards?**

Maintaining what we have

One of thing that makes Edinburgh unique is its retention of a residential city centre with a wide variety of tenures and house types. Families still live in the centre. The historic fabric of many buildings is maintained as people invest in their homes. Or at least as much as they can. Many tenements have significant defects and a backlog of repairs. Edinburgh has more listed buildings of any city other than London, and many are residential. Whilst this enhances the value, it presents some challenges. **Do we need a policy-based approach to sustainable building maintenance? Could new development help support repair of existing stock through planning agreements? Should long-term maintenance be a planning concern?**

Historically, the protection of residential amenity was a cornerstone of the statutory planning system. Whilst the quality of the houses themselves is important, the quality of the wider residential environment can be more so. Issues such as daylight, noise or pollution are components of this and the lack of each of these can cause serious environmental and health impacts. Some, like daylighting, have criteria set down in a British Standard which can be applied to any new development. The World Health Organisation launched new guidelines in October 2018 noting that noise is one of the top environmental hazards in Europe. However, it is not considered a planning matter. **Do we need a policy approach to protecting amenity in existing residential areas? Should there be an Edinburgh standard or guideline of amenity that could be used to guide management of existing areas and inform new places being built?**



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Paper 2: A Prosperous and Equitable City

Background

Edinburgh's knowledge-based economy, together with strengths in tourism and the presence of the Scottish government mean that the city scores well on many economic indicators. Financial services and insurance, a long-established sector, employs 33,000 in the city. Almost 64% of the city's workforce who are in jobs have at least a degree level qualification; this is a higher proportion than any other UK city. Over 38,000 people work in Edinburgh's digital economy. Edinburgh has the lowest unemployment rate of any major UK city, and much of the 10% growth in jobs since 2012 was made possible by inward migration. Because it is home to high paying sectors, it is an affluent city, even by European standards. Yet there are still almost 80,000 residents living on incomes below the UK poverty level, and in several wards poverty rates exceed 25%.

Edinburgh's Economic Strategy (2018) seeks to "enable good growth". The Strategy is built around the aims of innovation and inclusion, and makes reference to listening to communities. It says that delivery of the strategy depends on strong collaboration between "anchor institutions that guide development of the city". Over the past decade, a number of high profile developments have been promoted notably through The Edinburgh 12 initiative, on the basis that they will bring "jobs and growth". Other planning considerations and the voices of civil society are given less weight. The new Economic Strategy and consultation on the forthcoming Local Development Plan provide an opportunity for more balanced decisions about future development.

Transition to a low carbon economy

The necessary transition to a low carbon economy needs to be grasped as an opportunity to improve quality of life for our citizens and to strengthen the local economy. The city council has been working with the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and is expected to produce proposals for Low Emission Zones (LEZs) in May 2019. However, the City has set a target of a 42% reduction of carbon emissions by 2020. Given that walking represents 40% of all journeys to work in the city centre (18% city-wide), this suggests that the current levels of pollution are being imported into the city rather than derived directly from the current population. **How can the City 2030 Plan support LEZs by reducing commuting from outside the city and cross-town commuting. Are measures such as applying enhanced emission standards to vehicles owned by residents the right way to tackle this?**

Decarbonising the housing stock is important in Edinburgh, where almost half the houses were built before 1945, and two-thirds of accommodation is in flats, most of which are in mixed-tenure blocks. Improved energy efficiency in houses will also reduce fuel poverty, which affects 24% of Edinburgh households, reduce the flow of money out of the local economy to energy companies, and create local economic activity. However, it is accepted that much of the historic stock comprises listed buildings or buildings in Conservation Areas, which presents limited opportunities for significant interventions. They also represent a huge pool of embodied energy capable of adaptive repair and renovation. Given the importance of heritage to the city's economy, pragmatic and proportionate approaches to addressing these properties will be needed. **What policy initiatives can be developed to help manage fuel poverty in residential properties?**

Edinburgh's City Housing Strategy was updated in 2018. It says that council-led housebuilding will favour brownfield sites and have high energy efficiency. There will also be investment in existing homes to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. However, the strategy is strongly focused on the social rented sector, which, while very important, is not the main source of new housing. Might new housing developments be required to support district heating schemes? Should every new housing development not include renewable energy technology built in, such as all roofs required to have solar panels (as was done recently in California, USA)? Continental cities that have led the way in low carbon design have set ambitious standards for new development. Are there areas of the city where community-based renewable energy companies might be set up, with revenues reinvested locally? Also, could new area-based initiatives deliver building maintenance and carbon reduction in the way that Housing Action Areas tackled modernisation in the 1970s? **How can City Plan 2030 contribute to energy efficiency in homes and reduction of fuel poverty? What new policy mechanisms are needed to ensure new development builds renewable technology into the fabric from the outset? Could a modern equivalent of an HHA be created to help facilitate change?**

Zero Waste Scotland has worked with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce to identify business opportunities through a move towards a circular economy in Edinburgh. Particular potential has been identified in the events and festivals sectors; in facilities/buildings management; ICT and data infrastructure; and by-products from the production of alcohol. **How might City Plan 2030 support the growth of a circular economy?**

Spatial inequality – helping all citizens to benefit

The Community Empowerment Act and the Socio-Economic Duty both put reduction of inequality at the heart of public policy decision-making in Scotland. These requirements should be central to City Plan 2030, especially as disposal of major public assets at Astley Ainslie and at Redford Barracks will happen. The draft Planning Bill before the Scottish Parliament proposes the introduction of Local Neighbourhood Plans, enabling communities to come together to articulate their vision for their locale. How these might work in practice is unknown, but it could provide a bottom-up policy framework to guide city development. **How can City Plan 2030 shape the future use of these extensive sites in a manner consistent with local needs and ambitions? To what extent should community interest dictate city policies?**

There are several dimensions to spatial inequality, most notably linked to class, gender, ethnicity and disability, which can be intertwined. There are also examples of good practice internationally of how user-involvement in the plan-making process can lead to more equitable outcomes. **How can the preparation and content of City Plan 2030 deliver a more equitable Edinburgh?**

Local food networks

There is a growing market for local products, particularly in food. Not only does this reduce food-miles in long supply chains, but it carries the appeal of authenticity. This can add value to the tourist experience for example, and hotels and restaurants are responding accordingly. There is at least one city centre hotel that serves guests breakfast honey from hives located on its roof. In Belgium, a supermarket has created a vegetable garden on its roof, selling produce in the shop and using waste heat from its environmental systems to support growing. In addition, allotments remain much sought after in the city and, if protected or increased in numbers, have the potential to feed into local supply chains. **Could pop-up community gardens be supported on vacant and under-used sites? What policy initiatives could be established to drive local food production?**

Infrastructure

Leith Docks were constructed by the city to further its economic agenda. They were paid for by a penny tax on ale, using existing commercial activities to cross-subsidise development. Today, planning agreements are used to help fund public infrastructure. However, this does not cover all the costs involved, and depends on development taking place to release funds. This development imposes its own demands on infrastructure, with existing communities seldom experiencing directly the benefits but enjoying the impact in terms of increased congestion, longer queues at the GP surgery, etc. **Should all infrastructure costs of development be borne by the developer (and landowner). Should the enhanced value of land created through a planning consent be captured fund infrastructure improvements?**

Connectivity matters for prosperity and equity, both within the city and its region and to places beyond. These matters are dealt with more fully in a separate paper. Now that a decision has been taken to extend the trams to Leith and Newhaven, perhaps the main issues are about **how to capitalise upon, and equitably share the benefits of development opportunities created by the extension?**

Innovation and start-ups

There is a risk that strong demand for commercial property, combined with its ownership by investors, will push up rentals and that this will restrict access to the kind of cheap, easy-in/easy-out premises that are so essential for business start-ups. Similarly, a key feature of the changing economy has been the proliferation of social enterprises, which again are likely to require cheap and accessible floorspace. Edinburgh has seen some successful innovative reuse of redundant buildings to provide clusters for nascent businesses, for example at Argyle House and at Summerhall. **Where are the opportunities to replicate such models and what planning policies are needed to facilitate them? What policies are needed to facilitate this?**

A smart, data-driven city

Data-driven technologies are likely to impact on most, if not all, of the above concerns. If the local development plan is to be robust to and beyond 2030 it needs to be aware of the likely impacts of smart city technologies, and set a framework through which the new technologies serve the public interest and remain accountable. Like many other cities, Edinburgh was blindsided by the rapid emergence and growth of short-term letting through platform businesses, and lessons should be learned from that. In addition, there are great opportunities to use emergent technologies to bring citizens closer to decision-making, and to make data about the city available to them.

Summary and the way ahead

Edinburgh is a prosperous city but that prosperity has not been shared equitably within the city. Some of the factors consigning so many Edinburgh households to poverty and to fuel poverty relate to macro-economic trends and public policy levers at levels beyond the local. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis the city prioritised “jobs and growth” without sufficient concern for the quality of that growth or for who were the beneficiaries. The 2018 Economic Strategy was therefore welcome in putting issues such as carbon reduction and redress of spatial inequalities on the agenda, not as barriers to the economy but as opportunities. In contrast, such concerns have been marginal in planning policy nationally and locally, with the system being framed to deliver on the aspirations of the property development industry. City Plan 2030 presents Edinburgh with an opportunity to plan for a city that is both prosperous and equitable: what ideas and evidence are needed to make that possibility a reality?



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Paper three: The Connected City

Background

A key characteristic of a successful city is its connectivity both within itself and with its surroundings – physically, as in movement and transport systems, and increasingly, also in virtual networks. Connectivity enables access, facilitating social, cultural and business interactions which make it prosperous and a good place to live.

Although there is widespread awareness of connectivity issues in Edinburgh, it tends to be fragmented, with vociferous lobbying groups – for instance, cyclists, private motorists, traffic engineers, pedestrians, business organisations – all pressing their own specific agendas with limited regard for the overall picture. Thus, one person's transport usage becomes someone else's congestion or air quality issue. Currently initiatives are fragmented and tend to represent the best funded and most vocal lobbies rather than actual need. City planning needs to redefine itself from its present reactive regulatory administrative role responding to the latest petitioning faction, into an enlightened agency which initiates and coordinates all the strands of connectivity into a coherent inclusive and positive approach and which delivers practical outcomes.

Connectivity is not a transport issue, or at least one solely. In a digital age with break-through technologies in Artificial Intelligence happening on an almost daily basis, technological connectivity will become the most important factors for a successful city. In benchmark surveys about what is important to households, 25 years ago a telephone was seen as a critical requirement for modern living. Today it is high-speed access to the internet. However, digital expansion presents new challenges for city planning. The impact of AirBnB is highlighted elsewhere but there can be no denying the market impact it has had. Local Development Plans prepared on 10-year cycles are proposed by the Planning Bill in front of the Scottish Parliament will not be capable to addressing issues as they emerge. A more nimble, tech-savvy approach to planning and city management will be required.

Reducing Traffic Volumes

Edinburgh has the second highest traffic volumes (in average vehicle-miles per day) in Scotland after Glasgow, and this is still steadily increasing. Most other measures suggested in this work stream will be rendered less effective unless there is a concomitant reduction in the numbers of vehicles on the road. At the same time, essential travel, delivery servicing and public transport must remain. The key element is therefore to discourage traffic which has no need to be within the city.

High parking charges have not proved to be a deterrent but perhaps these should be extended to cover all parking including in the workplace, retail and leisure facilities, and perhaps even the private house in the suburbs, using revenue to pay for sustainable and active travel investments.

Edinburgh's original Congestion Charging proposal still has negative associations in some quarters, but as with the tram this should not prevent re-examination of a new scheme which positively addresses and resolves the previous flaws. This approach can be supported by local measures to

achieve low traffic neighbourhoods within residential areas. **Should price regulation of road space be considered? Are there more creative approaches for cross-funding of transport infrastructure?**

The Walking City

All journeys end on foot. We are all ultimately pedestrians once we have left our bus or tram, parked our car or bike. Walking is the main mode of travel for over a third of Edinburgh residents - the highest percentage in Scotland. Pedestrian measures must be disaggregated from and become the primary element of “active travel” programmes, which currently have an undue bias towards cycling provision out of all proportion to actual or potential usage. The needs of both are different and not always compatible (eg ‘shared’ surfaces).

The first imperative must therefore be the principle of the well-designed walking city, where pedestrians have priority, are safe from risks, and feel comfortable. Considerable work was done by Jan Gehl and others on creating a quality pedestrian environment, but this does not seem to have been translated in practical action. It will not necessarily require full pedestrianisation of streets in most instances apart from pavement widenings, but it will require robust enforcement of existing measures such as the 20mph zones, freeing pavements from parked vehicles, illegal cycling and encroaching signage and café tables, and more focus on street design, public spaces, design and maintenance on paving, decluttering, litter clearing, regulating road works and addressing the precedence of pedestrian flows at junctions (eg zebra crossings, countdown timers). Currently these activities are undertaken by a range of unconnected agencies for whom, in many cases, it is not their main priority. **How can we deliver a city best experienced on foot? What initiatives are needed?**

Integrated Public Transport

Edinburgh is often cited as having an exceptionally good public transport system, and in comparison with other British cities this is true – there is a higher percentage of bus usage than any other Scottish city. However, there are still problems of peak-hour congestion and delays and the lack of interchangeability between different modes and even between different routes. This leads to longer waiting time for bus users (because they cannot transfer) and more and emptier buses plying the streets, and encourages car usage if there is no single route to a particular destination.

Transfer ticketing would give better choice, faster journeys, reduce bus movements and permit a simplification of the extremely complex route structure. Other issues include siting and design of bus stops.

The Edinburgh tramway has understandably been the centre of considerable public interest. However, in considering the proposed extension it is necessary to distinguish between the management failings in cost control and delivery of the original contract, and the positive current benefits of higher-than-predicted ridership, the pollution-free technology, and the fact that Leith has a higher population than many rail-connected Scottish towns such as Linlithgow. An extension could therefore be beneficial providing its construction is managed properly and its design maximises the advantages of the tram – eg a continuous non-shared reservation (as per York Place) for the whole length of Leith Walk. **What inter-urban systems are required to support greater use of public transport? What policy initiatives are required to improve the current system?**

Air Pollution

Poor air quality is recognised as a health hazard, and transport has been identified as a major contributor, especially for nitrous oxides and particulate matter. Edinburgh is proposing Low Emission Zones in line with the Scottish Government’s aspirations, although if these are to be anything more than sloganising they will need to be backed by identifying serious practical measures and how they might be enforced.

Reducing traffic volumes would immediately help, although it is worth noting that transport contributes only 39% of NOx emissions, so a complete programme must look at other sources of pollution also. In Edinburgh, a significant factor will be from the construction machinery and processes in the continuous redevelopment of the city's buildings and infrastructure.

The worst offenders tend to be diesel engines. However, generalised approaches based on fuel type or engine displacement do not acknowledge the more nuanced issues involved. Older vehicles emit greater pollutants as do HGV and LGV vehicles as well as diesel buses. Replacement by alternative fuels should be a major objective. It should be relatively easy because many of these vehicles – buses, taxis, couriers, deliveries – have semi-fixed runs within the city and return to base for recharging.

There remains the thorny issue of a residential city centre, where many homeowners also are car owners. **Should policies promote anti-car use, or anti-car ownership?**

A major objective will be to move away from carbon-based energy supplies. However, caution needs to be exercised in promoting electric cars. A straight one-for-one replacement will do nothing for congestion, for road safety, for promoting active travel and health or freeing up urban space, and charging points will add to rather than reduce kerbside clutter. Hybrid cars are even more doubtful, as when the batteries start to fail they tend to revert exclusively to petrol driven mode. A proper study of all sources of air pollution needs to be undertaken to decide on the best overall solutions. **Does a simple fuel type shift hold the answer to traffic pollution? What infrastructure is needed to support a shift away from carbon-based fuels?**

Virtual City

In addition to physical movement, connectivity also embraces remote interaction, from the nineteenth-century electric telegraph and telephones to present-day technology. Edinburgh is well equipped with good internet services, and it is important that it continues to stay abreast of technological upgrades. Even with wireless expertise, considerable intervention and adaptation – cables, transmitters, masts, sensors, control equipment – must be threaded through the historic streets and buildings in a way which does not undermine the inherent quality and cultural heritage. **What scope is there for greater synergy with utility grids and other networks in adopting consistent standards for data exchange to mutual benefit?**

Smart City

A “Smart City” is a designation many cities aspire to. Stripped of the hype, it essentially focuses on using its networks of information and communication technology (ICT) to collect data on activities and functions, and exploiting that knowledge to make intelligent management decisions, act efficiently, resolve problems, and make best use of resources to achieve sustainable economic development and a high quality of life. Smart cities therefore have a strong measure of innovation combined with active governance and robust leadership to recognise and make use of it.

Edinburgh already has the first of these characteristics, but so far has demonstrated rather less of the second. Surprisingly, the city makes very little use of the considerable knowledge base on these issues within the four universities. For example, it is ironic that, although talks of energy-saving combined-heat-and-power systems have been discussed by the Council for decades, only the University has actually delivered a successful private network which they are now extending. Municipal / academic partnerships would be beneficial to both sides.

In the transport field, there are already some innovations such as bus tracking and parking-by-phone. There are many other opportunities, such as intelligent waste bins to raise the standards of

cleanliness (and therefore environmental quality) of streets; for identifying and repairing potholes and road faults; for better management of temporary diversions; and many other applications. **How can Edinburgh link Smart City opportunities to land management and city planning approaches?**

Citizens' City

Central to all of this is ensuring strong citizen support and participation. Edinburgh has an articulate and informed population who take a keen interest in their city (48% of adults have a university-level qualification) and it is necessary for the local authority to realise that these too are 'stakeholders', and not just confine their consultations to business and financial originations. A strong partnership approach with resident and community engagement will enable the benefits of a 'smart' city to permeate through the populace and, particularly with its emphasis on sustainability and energy use, address issues such as fuel poverty and life quality. **In a modern city, do we need better, faster and more integrated processes for city governance?**



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Paper 4: The Expanding City

Background

Edinburgh is going through a period of expansion that is arguably unprecedented since the inter-war period when the built-up area doubled. The National Records of Scotland projections for 2014-2039 anticipated that Edinburgh would see a population increase of 21%, while that for Midlothian would be 26% (the highest rate of growth in Scotland) and 18% for East Lothian. This reflects a mix of market driven and public policy factors; like all projections, the figures depend on assumptions that may or may not prove reliable.

The Strategic Development Plan for the city region – South-East Scotland Strategic Plan or SESPlan for short - reflects Scottish Government (SG) policy. It states that “over the next 20 years, most growth will be focused in and around Edinburgh and in indicative ‘*Long Term Growth Corridors*’” and that up to 2030, it is likely to be on “land already identified in existing and proposed Local Development Plans”. This could severely damage the Green Belt and identity of settlements.

The growth corridors are to the east and south-east of Edinburgh; around Leith/Newhaven/Granton (linked to the tram route), and to the west of the city. Following SG policy, the intention is that “the City of Edinburgh will meet a larger proportion of the region’s housing need than in previous plans. It is asserted that this may help reduce commuting by car and transport related carbon emissions, as well as making best use of existing infrastructure.

Concerns from civil society about edge of city growth have been focused on three related matters. The first of these is a desire to protect the existing greenbelt and associated prime farmland. Related to this has been the way in which open space has been lost through permissions granted (sometimes on appeal) for developments on greenfield land while vacant land (brownfield) within the city has been left undeveloped. Finally, the quality of much new development is seen as falling short of best European standards in terms of design and sustainability.

The predictions

SESPlan will significantly shape the agenda for the next Local Development Plan whose production and consultation will follow as soon as it is approved. What seems clear is that much of the case for ambitious housing targets rests on assumptions about migration into the city, including a continued growth in the student population. Questions also need to be asked about the need for further land releases given the significant amounts of housing land that has not been developed during the last decade due to lack of market demand and austerity. For example, parcels of land consented for housing development decades ago remain to see a single dwelling built. The South East Wedge, released from Green Belt in an earlier Lothian’s Strategic Development Plan in the late 1990s still hasn’t reached its development objectives.

The adoption of a growth corridors approach may give some flexibility if actual development falls short of, or exceeds, expectations. However, the Local Development Plan needs to be proactive in

prioritising sites for growth that do not damage Edinburgh's natural and cultural heritage nor compromise the identity and quality of life of existing settlements. It should also avoid a loose scatter around opportunistic locations that might maximise returns to developers but exacerbate car dependent commuting.

Are there known or unknown factors that might impact significantly on the housing needs and demands between now and 2030? Where should new housing be located? How big should Edinburgh become – should civil society's views be sought? Should SG allocate development more equitably amongst Local Authorities?

The Green Belt

Local Development Plans to "identify and maintain Green Belts and other countryside designations fulfilling a similar function where they are needed: to maintain the identity, character and landscape setting of settlements and prevent coalescence; to protect and provide access to open space; and to direct development to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration." In addition, two cross-boundary green networks are proposed – to the west and to the east of Edinburgh.

Green belts are often portrayed in negative terms as stopping the organic growth of settlements. In addition not all land within a green belt such as Edinburgh's is necessarily in use for agriculture or recreation. However, green belts contribute significantly not only to the visual setting of the city but provide for local food networks and accessible recreation opportunities. Properly managed they can also aid biodiversity and help to mitigate adverse climate change effects through tree/woodland safeguard and enhancement. The perception is that Green Belt policies are not being followed properly and require stronger protection.

How should we protect the landscape setting of Edinburgh, and enhance the quality of open space around the edge of the city?

Expansion inside the city

At present, Edinburgh remains a relatively compact city, and there is general support for development on vacant or brownfield land first. The failure of past plans to deliver such development, while also conceding permissions for development on greenfield sites around the edge of the city has contributed to a loss of public confidence in the administration of planning by the Scottish Government and at local level. Furthermore, development has been allowed on valued areas of publicly-used open space within the city, as happened in Craiglockhart, for example.

The health and environment benefits of high quality public open space are widely documented, but too often have been given insufficient weight in planning decisions. The UK Shared Framework for Sustainable Development should mean that equal weight to all elements including good environment, healthy society, secure economy and good governance, supported by sound scientific analysis. With Austerity Britain and serious funding challenges for public authorities, bodies such as the National Health Service and Ministry of Defence seek to dispose of land for maximum commercial return rather than public benefit. The planning system must regain a focus on the long term public interest first and foremost, and prioritise the conservation of open spaces. The Community Empowerment Act could offer opportunities for the council to work with communities to this end.

What policies should be included in the Local Development Plan to safeguard areas of public open space within the city from pressure to commercialise their use. Should greater priority be given to ~~while~~ delivering development on vacant (brownfield) land before greenfield?

Quality of new development

We live in a speculative land economy. Landowners seek to maximise the benefit they receive in the disposal of land for development. Developers compete against one another to secure access to development land, pushing land prices up. The local authority seeks to secure maximum return in planning gain to support infrastructure improvements. This market-led, demand-driven pressure comes at a price, and usually that price is quality. The UK has some of the meanest space standards for new housing in Europe. Modern housing estates contain little amenity space. **Is Edinburgh prepared to settle for less than the best in terms of design and sustainability in new development? Simply labelling a development “Luxury”, “Executive” or even “Luxury Executive” does not make it a good development. Indeed, too often the converse is true with much of the space being given over to excessive housing, parking and soil sealing to the detriment of site quality.**

Edinburgh should aspire to be a European leader in terms of imaginative and sustainable development rather than just another place for standard houses and layouts that volume house builders can roll out in their sleep? Broad principles are obvious – protect views, water courses and trees (twiggy saplings are no compensation, though new planting will eventually help), ensure sustainable drainage systems, create walkable environments and provide quality open space not just the minimum required allocation somewhere on the edge of the site. Add in orientation, variety of house types and layouts, and use wherever possible of local and renewable building materials and energy.

The amount of projected new development means that the coming decade will stamp a significant imprint on the city for many generations to come.

How should we ensure that new development enhances rather than diminishes Edinburgh’s reputation as an outstanding city? Should new guidance be prepared to deliver better quality, holistic development in balance with the heritage requirements of the site?



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Paper Five: The Heritage City

Background

Edinburgh is a unique place. The exceptional built and natural environment of the capital has underpinned the city's culture, tourism and wider economy since at least the eighteenth century. Its special qualities remain assets of incalculable value in the twenty-first century. Place identity matters, as cities become ever more standardised.

Part of the challenge for Edinburgh is that its branding as a visitor destination based on festivals and international tourism risks undermining its identity and uniqueness. We need to balance the local and the global, to remain a welcoming city which works for residents and visitors. Conserving our buildings, trees and landscapes, with access for all to our public spaces, matters not just for amenity but as part of the way to conserve scarce resources and mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Therefore how our city plans for, and manages, this legacy has to be a central concern of civic policy and action.

The Heart of the City

The World Heritage Site covering 4.2 sq. kms. is literally at the centre of our city. A combination of its centrality, scale and appeal mean that it is under stress. There has always been pressure to put commercial gain first, too often resulting in developments that detract from, rather than enhance the quality of Edinburgh. In the 1970s, the St. James Comprehensive Redevelopment scheme stamped that message on the skyline. Recent years have seen highly controversial developments supported by the City Council, in some cases through "commercially confidential" agreements with developers that citizens cannot scrutinise. The undertakings that the city gave when seeking World Heritage status in the mid-1990s need to be reaffirmed and acted upon.

UNESCO requires World Heritage Sites to have a Management Plan, and Edinburgh has one for 2017-2022. Authenticity is one of the distinctive qualities highlighted in the plan. UNESCO says that it is the juxtaposition of the contrasting architecture and design of the Old and New Towns, together with the gardens and views through the valley connecting them that gives Edinburgh "its unique character". And yet... for several months a year the gardens have become a funfair / stage for concerts, and views of the gardens from Princes Street were screened off during the Festival in 2018. Permission was given in February 2019 to build on top of the Waverley Market, blocking views and contradicting decades of planning policy.

Certainly, our city centre provides attractive commercial opportunities, but we have a planning system precisely because extracting maximum commercial returns is not seen as the only factor that should determine what happens. Decisions need to be informed by appropriate professional expertise, and in Edinburgh that must mean that officials with a deep grasp of conservation have a strong voice. **Are existing policies providing sufficient protection for the townscape and topography that made Edinburgh a World Heritage city? Are they delivering the kind of city citizens want?**

Chasing tourist numbers

The city's 2016 mid-term review of its 2020 Tourism Strategy highlighted "the critical importance of maintaining the city's core assets, the historic city centre, World Heritage status and the Festivals." It also sought to increase the number of visitors to the city by a third between 2012 and 2020, from 3.27M per year to 4.39M, and was ahead of that target, so the "stretch target" was upped to 4.8M per year. Several industry consultees urged more ambitious targets, and the review aspired to increase the industry's influence over "bigger policy areas" and deliver strong branding and marketing. Neither the strategy nor its review undertook any proper analysis of the carrying capacity of the city in relation to tourist growth despite recognising the need for investment in infrastructure in transport, the public realm and in maintaining the "historic built environment".

One consequence of the international growth in tourism and the successful promotion by the industry locally has been the proliferation of hotel developments, particularly in the World Heritage Site. The market has effectively excluded the option of affordable housing, and planning decisions have acquiesced, notably for key sites in the Old Town, and granted permissions. Hotels are now able to outbid offices too, placing the commercial sector under pressure. There can be no doubt that tourism has contributed much to making Edinburgh a city where there is full employment, even if the profile of jobs in that sector is skewed towards the relatively low paid end of the spectrum. Some argue that levying "tourist tax" will affect tourist growth adversely, though it could also incentivise the city council to further boost support for the sector.

Civic Edinburgh has had very little say in the dramatic way in which tourism has impacted on the city over the past decade. Looking ahead, **how do we want to see tourism develop? How might further growth be accommodated and what benefits will it bring, not just to international investors in the industry, but to residents of the city? What planning policies are needed to quality of the environment and diversity of uses that sustain the tourist industry, but are also threatened by its growth aspirations?**

Local area identities

Edinburgh's neighbourhoods also have their own identities, as recognised by the fact that there are 50 Conservation Areas in the city. However, outside the World Heritage Site, management plans only exist for Leith and Inverleith. Conservation Areas are popular with the public and are key to informing and delivering what has been called quality place-making. The Conservation Area Character Appraisal for each Conservation Area needs to be given weight in the proposed City Plan 2030 and in decisions on planning applications. Signage could enhance awareness of Conservation Areas and their unique qualities.

Why not build on the success of the Conservation Area concept to foster identity and respect for the history and special features of every area of the city? Is this something that could be taken up by Community Councils? Might the Council promote Local Place Plans, using new powers in the Planning Bill that was introduced to Holyrood in 2017? **How might citizens share ideas on strengthening local area identities, and how can such identities inform the making of plans and decisions on conservation and development?**

While each area is unique, those districts where tenements are a key component need special care, because of the challenges of common repairs and accommodating on-street parking. **How do we ensure the longevity and functionality of these neighbourhoods? Do we need a strategic policy-based approach to maintenance of existing buildings and areas? Are Edinburgh's communities losing their individual identity?**

Despite the many Conservation Areas across the city, most of Edinburgh is does not benefit from such designation. Investment is required to improve the amenity of these areas as well as necessary support to address significant issues such as fuel poverty, social deprivation and a sense of being left behind. Concerns also exist about the quality of new areas being built, whether they are private housing estates or peripheral business parks. Our aspiration should be the creation of places capable of the Conservation Areas of tomorrow. **What scale of investment and what policy initiatives are required to improve existing areas? How can we improve the quality of the city overall?**

Retailing and town centres

Shops have been a vital part of our city, from the grand department stores on Princes Street to suburban supermarkets to the myriad of independent stops that give character to our local “town centres” and High Streets. However, retailing is being changed by online shopping and changing patterns of consumption. The demise of House of Fraser and the disposal of its premises at the West End encapsulates much wider trends in the sector, as well as posing some fundamental questions about the future of Princes Street itself. New “experiences” or “lifestyle leisure” complexes are appearing, with perhaps the best example being the proposed the Johnny Walker Experience in the former Binns Department Store which is a brand experience rather than mere retail facility and mainly reliant on tourists rather than residents for its customers.

Similarly, space originally assigned to shops in the still uncompleted St James Quarter seems likely to be changed to “experience” attractions, and cafes and restaurants. The consented upward expansion of Waverley Market is not for retail, but for a range of food and drink experiences. On more traditional streets, a steady change from retail to office and service businesses has kept units occupied. **In this period of change and uncertainty do we need an expert panel to plan and oversee the future of Princes Street, the most iconic street in Scotland? What policy responses are need to ensure that street level units remain in use, supporting local community vitality?**

An unconsidered outcome of the tourism drive has been the profusion of “tartan tat” outlets, or outside the historic core. Changes in other parts of the retail structure of neighbours has seen the rise of the charity shop. Who sells what in a shop is beyond any regulatory control, but the implications for not just vitality but viability of local communities is significant. **How can the retail frontages on our streets be better regulated and managed? How can we enhance vitality on core streets on our neighbourhoods?**

The spread of advertising on A-boards that clutter pavements outside so many commercial establishments has now been banned, largely on the grounds of safety than clutter. However, the colonisation of pedestrian pavements continues to be a challenge, in particular for those with visual impairments or other disabilities. Narrow pavements in the centre are made narrower with litter bins, road signs, bus shelters, etc, or by pubs and cafes taking up half the width with tables for patrons (however civilising the café culture is). **How can pavement space on traditional high streets or retail areas be better managed?**

The 1980s and 1990s saw a huge expansion of big box retail outlets around the edge of Edinburgh, set amidst a sea of tarmac parking areas, and filled with chain stores. Such developments made Edinburgh a less unique place. Present trends suggest that the best days of such behemoths may be behind them. Meanwhile empty units and charity shops have become familiar features of shopping street in many parts of town. **Does the shift in taste towards “authenticity” open new opportunities for new uses in such premises? How might the vacation of different types of retail units in different parts of the city be used to foster new start-ups and creative industry hubs?**



Our Unique City

Our Past, Our City, Our Future

Summary and the way ahead

Edinburgh faces significant challenges if it is to retain its unique qualities, and needs a skilled, confident approach to planning the future of the city. Conservation needs to be at the heart of a city development strategy but innovation, creativity and a focussed drive for high quality in all endeavours is required. A coherent and strong civic voice needs to be heard.

Our Unique City sets out questions, poses thoughts, and hopes to be thought-provoking. The Cockburn Association welcomes all comments. We do not claim to have all the right questions let alone the right answers, but we hope that members, civic groups, community councils and any other party will engage with us in the process.

Much evidence needs collected to advance the subject. With the City of Edinburgh about to embark on producing the next Local Development Plan – City Plan 2030 – it is in listening and engaging mode.

Over 2019, we will be organising workshops, seminars, etc to further our thinking. Engaging positively and critically in the preparation of City Plan 2030 is a clear objective.

However, our purpose for doing this is wider than the Local Development Plan. Many issues raised sit outside the formal planning process. Some are well beyond the control of the City Council and rest with the Scottish Government or other organisations. Others might rest with residents solely and directly. It will provide the Cockburn with a clear set of priorities for action knowing that these issues are recognised and accepted as important by residents and communities in the city.

Let us know your views. What are the main issues facing Edinburgh in the now? In the future? What really upsets you? What places or qualities in the city need to be protected or enhanced? Write to us, or email us at uniquecity@cockburnassociation.org.uk or admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk or straight to the Director at director@cockburnassociation.org.uk.

We will post updates on our website – www.cockburnassociation.org.uk and through our Facebook and twitter feeds.

Finally, as a local charity, we are only able to undertake such initiatives if we have the resources to so. We are a membership body, open to anyone who supports our work and loves Edinburgh as much as we do. Please join or send us a donation. We need your help.