Edinburgh Public Realm Strategy
City of Edinburgh Council

3 December 2009
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1 Introduction

1.1 Edinburgh is an outstanding capital city with a reputation for quality. The distinctiveness of its built and natural environment is recognised by its world heritage site status. Its position, as the capital city, means that its performance – economically and socially – affects the way Scotland as a nation performs and is perceived.

1.2 Few cities are defined by their physical and built environment to the same extent as Edinburgh. The quality of the city’s environmental and the economic success of the city are closely interlinked. The city’s identity and sense of place contribute directly to its economic success and its attractiveness as a place to live and work. For Edinburgh to maintain and enhance its competitive position, it must continue to put its identity and place – it’s Unique Selling Point – at the centre of its strategic activities.

1.3 The public realm has a key role to play in this process. It is widely recognised that a successful public realm is one of the key components of achieving a successful place. The public realm acts as stage upon which the life of the city is played out. It is the glue that binds together the city’s diverse areas.

1.4 The Council’s Single Outcome Agreement acknowledges the privileged role the City of Edinburgh Council plays in realising both local and national objectives. The Council is dedicated to enhancing and improving the unique built and natural heritage that the city boasts and to providing well designed, sustainable places, which reflect Edinburgh’s role as the economic, cultural and ceremonial capital of Scotland.

1.5 The city has an excellent track record in delivering public realm but the level of investment has not matched that of many other leading cities, a situation which can disadvantage Edinburgh in a competitive urban market. This strategy aims to deliver an enhanced and improved public realm across the entire city.
1.6 The Strategy consists of a series of objectives that, once realised, will deliver strategic and coordinated improvements across the city. The objectives seek to realise the disproportionately high value of a quality public realm, explain how the improvements can be achieved, put forward a set of priorities for investment, look at funding options and show how Edinburgh can be a leading authority in this field. The Strategy will be implemented through an Action Plan.

2 Definition of Public Realm

2.1 For the purposes of this document, public realm can be defined as those parts of the city where people can gain unrestricted access (at least during daylight hours) for the purpose of passing through, meeting, visiting and enjoying. It is where we come together as a community, not merely a place for functional movement.

3 Vision

3.1 Our strategic vision for public realm is as follows: -

"Edinburgh recognises that the public realm forms an integral part of the public face of the city. Edinburgh will develop and maintain a high quality public realm to complement the outstanding built and natural qualities of this unique capital city".
4 Background

4.1 The benefits of public realm investment have been known for some time and, since the mid 1990s, a number of highly successful and award winning\(^1\) projects have been undertaken in Edinburgh. These have achieved significant improvements to the quality of the city's public spaces.

4.2 The main focus of investment over the past 10 years has been the Old Town. The improvements to the Royal Mile, Cockburn Street, numerous closes and, more recently, the Grassmarket have all served to achieve a step change to the vitality and vibrancy of both the environment and economy of the area. The Old Town, as the focus for the Edinburgh Festival, provides a wonderful arena for the influx of tourists. The shift of emphasis from car to pedestrian domination, together with the use of appropriate natural surfacing materials, has delivered an environment of outstanding quality that complements the character of the Old Town and allows a contemporary use of this historic environment.

4.3 Improvements have not been exclusive to the Old Town. The opening up and redesign of St Andrew Square garden has proved enormously successful and will play an integral part in the regeneration of the east end of the New Town. The impact of the garden on the redevelopment of the St James Centre and the introduction of the tram into St Andrew Square demonstrate the coordinating role that a well designed public realm enhancement can have.

4.4 A number of large scale redevelopments contain well designed pieces of public realm that have a positive impact on the surrounding areas and help to knit these new areas into the existing fabric of the city. Developments at Quartermile and Fountainbridge are examples of this.

\(^1\) Holyrood North; High Street & St. Andrew Square
4.5 At a local level there are examples of neighbourhood schemes that, whilst modest in scale, still have a positive effect on the local community. Corstorphine, Portobello High Street and Morningside are all good examples of where an improved public realm has had a beneficial impact on the local economy and social vitality of the area.

4.6 There is now a better understanding of the economic, social and environmental benefits that public realm can contribute to the city.

4.7 The production of the Edinburgh Standards for Streets (ESS)\(^2\) has seen a more coordinated approach to public realm becoming a priority for all practitioners involved in shaping the built environment.

4.8 Where investment in Edinburgh’s public realm has been delivered it has been very effective but, in the absence of a strategic overview, the physical and financial benefits of the projects have not been fully realised. This strategy seeks to provide a clearer picture as to where the greatest benefits will be achieved, and help the Council deliver greatest value for money in its investments. It should also assist developers in better understanding the significant benefits of public realm investment.

5 Objectives

5.1 In order to carry forward the good work that has already been achieved, and to help realise our vision for the public realm, the following objectives have been set: -

\(^2\) Edinburgh Standards for Streets 2006 – City of Edinburgh Council
Objective 1: To raise awareness of the significance of the public realm.
Objective 2: To provide a clear framework for the delivery and maintenance of high quality, coordinated, connected and coherent public realm.
Objective 3: To develop priorities for investment in public realm.
Objective 4: To develop an approach to public realm funding and delivery that will allow the strategy to be realised.
Objective 5: To achieve excellence by following and sharing good practice.

5.2 There is now an opportunity for the Council to build on the principles set out in the Edinburgh City Local Plan, the Local Transport Strategy, the Edinburgh Standards for Streets and other Council initiatives relating to open space and street design, to ensure that our vision is achieved.

6 **OBJECTIVE 1: TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PUBLIC REALM**

Five Reasons to Invest in Public Realm

6.1 **Economic Growth and Inward Investment**
High quality public realm affects not only the aesthetics of our environment, but also the economics. Investing in Edinburgh's public realm is critical for sustainable economic growth. Edinburgh, as the capital of Scotland, needs to ensure a competitive edge in the global economy and it is well documented that investment in the public realm has
a positive impact on inward investment and can act as a catalyst for regeneration. A recent survey of UK business leaders confirmed that environmental quality was one of the key reasons for relocation – it provides the right perception of a prosperous and cared for environment. Ensuring that Edinburgh has a quality, well maintained public realm should be seen as a sound long-term investment.

6.2 Tourism
Tourism depends heavily on the environment; indeed good quality spaces can become destinations in their own right. Cleanliness, safety, ease of movement, and the distinctiveness and 'authenticity' of natural and cultural features are often the driving force behind a visitor's choice of destination. Visitor surveys consistently show that Edinburgh’s impressive natural setting and built environment are the main aspects which draw people to our city. All visitors will interact with the public realm and therefore it contributes at a disproportionately high level to the overall image of the city.

Edinburgh was recently awarded the Favourite UK City in the Guardian Travel Awards 2009, but it cannot afford to be complacent and must continue to improve to ensure this position in a highly competitive global market.

6.3 Place-making
Underpinning Edinburgh’s success is the quality and drama of its environment. It is what makes the city unique and distinct from its competitors. The public realm acts as a setting for the wealth of historic buildings and is therefore as important in maintaining and enhancing Edinburgh’s unique character as the buildings themselves. It also helps

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3 The Value of Public Space – CABE 2004
Paved with Gold: The Real Value of Good Street Design - CABE 2007
Public Perception of Glasgow City Centre After Public Realm Improvements – Glasgow City Centre Partnership 2001
to connect places, knitting existing and new development together and will be the defining feature of Edinburgh’s Waterfront. Public realm is important in promoting local identity and civic pride, its positive influence can have a significant impact on the community’s perception of an area, ensuring that Edinburgh remains a highly desirable place to live, work and enjoy.

6.4 Social Inclusion and Accessibility
A well designed, maintained and uncluttered street environment also has a vital role to play in promoting social inclusion. Poorly design spaces can exclude certain sections of society. The creation of successful and accessible public spaces offers everyone the opportunity for interaction, strengthening a sense of community. Evidence suggests that an improved pedestrian environment can also improve personal safety and security, and reduce vandalism.

6.5 Sustainability, Health and Wellbeing
A public realm that is safe, comfortable and well maintained affords the opportunity for passive recreation. The provision of attractive streets and spaces is more likely to encourage people to walk and cycle. This is not only highly sustainable due to the benefit of being pollution and congestion free, but it also encourages a more active nation which will help to reduce the risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiac diseases, amongst many other illnesses.

6.6 These objectives reflect the experience of other UK and international cities and show that carefully structured investment in the public realm can play a major part in regeneration and economic growth. The significance of investing in the public realm demonstrates the need for a common sense of purpose between the Council and others involved in the provision of public realm. Improving Edinburgh’s public realm should continue to be looked

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5 Walking Strategy – City of Edinburgh Council 2006
upon as a long term investment for future prosperity, as well as creating a desirable place to live, work and spend time.

7 OBJECTIVE 2: TO PROVIDE A CLEAR FRAMEWORK FOR DELIVERY AND MAINTENANCE

Policy Context

7.1 Several publications offering guidance relating to good design for the public realm already exist both in England and Scotland. The overarching national design policy document is Designing Places\(^6\), which aims to raise the standard of design in the built environment. More specifically, the manual for Streets\(^7\) and Designing Streets\(^8\) relate to the public realm and streetscape design. CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) has also published numerous best practice guides and papers\(^7\).

7.2 In an Edinburgh context, The Edinburgh City Vision 2003 - 2015\(^8\) recognises the need to radically enhance the city centre’s environment through a programme of public realm investment.

7.3 In response to this the Corporate Plan 2007 - 2011\(^9\), in setting out the city’s objectives refers to improving infrastructure and standards of maintenance of our parks, gardens and open spaces; promoting a safe physical environment; promoting and marketing the city drawing on its natural and built assets; reducing congestion by encouraging more sustainable modes of transport including walking and cycling, and improving the maintenance

\(^6\) Designing Places: A Policy Statement for Scotland 2001 – Scottish Executive
\(^7\) www.cabe.org.uk
\(^8\) The Edinburgh City Vision: Building a Better Edinburgh 2003 – City of Edinburgh Council
\(^9\) The Corporate Plan 2007 – 2011 – City of Edinburgh Council
and infrastructure of the city. These objectives are also reflected in the Single Outcome Agreement. Investing in Edinburgh's public realm will assist in achieving all of these objectives.

7.4 The principles set out in the Public Realm Strategy are wide-ranging and relate to and support a number of other strategic initiatives and policies, including those set out in the Local Transport Strategy (LTS) 2007-2012\(^1\), Edinburgh City Local Plan (ECLP) 2007\(^1\) and the Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan 2006\(^2\). In particular, the LTS recognises the many roles that streets have – they are where people live, work, meet, shop, relax, they act as a setting for the buildings, as well as being routes for movement. Far more emphasis is given to place-making, which is also a strong theme in the ECLP.

7.5 Sitting alongside the Public Realm Strategy is the Open Space Strategy, currently in preparation. Whilst the Public Realm Strategy looks at all areas accessible to the public, these tend to be concentrated on the streets, paths, squares and civic spaces. The Open Space Strategy is more concerned with the city's network of green spaces including parks, cycle routes, woodland, allotments and sports facilities.

7.6 In addition to the above, the Edinburgh Standards for Streets (2006) aims to facilitate the delivery of a streetscape that provides an enhanced environment for pedestrians and cyclists whilst responding to the built environment and meeting the requirements of traffic movement. This guidance is aimed at all practitioners whose work exerts an influence on the streetscape (public realm).

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\(^1\) Local Transport Strategy 2007 – 2012 – City of Edinburgh Council

\(^2\) Edinburgh City Local Plan 2007 – City of Edinburgh Council

\(^2\) Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan 2006 – City of Edinburgh Council
7.7 The Edinburgh Standards for Streets sets out eight principles, that should be adhered to by all practitioners designing or carrying out works within the public realm. These principles are the Council’s vision for Edinburgh’s public realm, linking the streetscape and place-making. The principles are listed below, and are explained in more detail in the Edinburgh Standards for Streets:

1. Preservation and enhancement of the historic fabric and grain of the city
2. Respecting and enhancing local character
3. New streets to contribute to formation of recognisable street pattern
4. Contributing to place-making
5. Best practice
6. Achieving quality – reduction in clutter; natural materials; minimum palette of materials; simple clean designs, and coordination of design and colour
7. Maintenance
8. A coordinated approach

7.8 A commitment was given to monitoring and reviewing The Edinburgh Standards for Streets and this is programmed as an integral part of the development of the Edinburgh Public Realm Strategy.

Public Realm Principles

7.9 The Edinburgh Standards for Streets makes reference to a number of quality issues that can have a significant impact on the appearance of the public realm. These include materials and decluttering. Further information relating to these issues will be developed providing clear guidance on the quality of public realm expected in Edinburgh.
Materials Map & Guidance:
The design, construction and maintenance of surfacing materials are instrumental in defining the character of urban streets and spaces. These materials provide the plinth on which buildings are set and the context within which they are seen. An essential element of Edinburgh's visual character is the relationship between the stone buildings and the stone or stone-coloured carriageways and footways. As a result, Edinburgh's aspiration for the streetscape is for simple design solutions, with a limited palette of materials, that will assist in the provision of a coherent public realm.

A materials map and guidance will detail which materials should be used for paving and street works across the city. In the city centre and Leith it will be detailed on a street by street basis, taking into consideration existing materials. For the remainder of the city, it will be based on a series of principles, relating to the character of the area. The Public Realm Action Plan identifies the materials which are appropriate for each area and the map will give greater detail for the city centre and Leith.

Key streets in the city centre, specifically those in the World Heritage Site, and conservation areas and villages will be required to use high quality natural paving materials: for example Caithness stone in the Old Town and Sandstone in the New Town.

Other streets in the city centre, including local shopping streets and main thoroughfares where public use is high, the use of precast concrete slabs on the footpaths will be expected. In more suburban areas and residential streets the use of asphalt or granolithic surfaces characteristic of these areas will be acceptable. Road surfacing materials will generally be either asphalt or setts. In places where historic surface finishes exist, either on the road or the footpath, these should be retained and repaired.
This information will be plotted on a geographical information system, enabling it to be shared. Additional information relating to issues such as street furniture and lighting could be added to the system in the future.

- **City Dressing strategy:**
  A city dressing strategy was approved in broad outline by the Planning Committee on 2 August 2008. The strategy aims to develop a range of initiatives which will enhance the appearance of the city during key events through use of lighting, flags, banners, artistic projects and performance. For this to take place, some basic infrastructure needs to be put in place.

  It may be possible to deliver parts of this Strategy opportunistically in association with other works, notably where comprehensive streetscape and public realm schemes are proposed. The tram works will facilitate improvements on Princes Street and Leith Walk.

- **Lighting strategy:**
  A well-designed, imaginative and consistent lighting scheme can dramatically transform an urban area. It not only affects the perception of the space by night, the specification of fixtures and columns can significantly affect the daytime appearance as well. A lighting scheme should be part of the overall urban design strategy to enhance key routes, contribute to user safety, and enliven public spaces.

  The Council is committed to preparing a lighting strategy. This will cover both street lighting and feature lighting and will tie in with the aspirations of the City Dressing Strategy. The strategy will set out lighting standards and address lighting levels and colour, and community safety issues. It will also provide greater coherence to the range of lighting columns used across the city and the way in which the streets are lit.
Decluttering:
Street clutter and obstructions should be minimised to ensure ease of pedestrian movement, particularly for those with impaired mobility, and to aid visual order. Minimising street furniture and signage can also assist with cleansing and refuse collection, and maintenance. Incremental improvements can be achieved through a systematic and planned approach to decluttering.

Co-location of street furniture will be encouraged, and alternatives to pole mounting of street signs should always be considered, including affixing to existing features or street furniture.

The Council has a decluttering protocol that will be introduced in detail with the review of the ESS. The protocol is aimed at the removal of obsolete and excessive street furniture whenever possible. Unnecessary and redundant street furniture and signage should always be removed when installing or replacing street furniture.

Maintenance and Management
7.10 A high quality public realm requires the combination of good design, detailing and materials. However, it also requires appropriate management and maintenance regimes; otherwise there is a risk that previous investment could be undermined.

7.11 A well maintained and managed public realm sends out a message that we care about our environment, and instils a sense of civic pride. It is more likely to encourage people to use the space and want to spend time there. The effective management of streets and spaces is therefore key to a sustainable and successful public realm.
7.12 It is vital that whole life costs of a public realm scheme are taken into consideration at the design stage. Maintenance costs may increase with intensity of use and therefore the choice of materials and detailing must take into consideration the proposed use, durability, longevity, aesthetics, installation and maintenance.

7.13 Within the Council's own spending it is important that all maintenance leads to an incremental improvement in the public realm and therefore the Council needs to consider ways of linking public realm improvement projects with asset management systems to ensure best value.

**Streetscape Delivery Process**

7.14 Underpinning the principle 'achieving quality' the Council put in place the Streetscape Delivery process in 2006. Details of the current delivery process are set out in Appendix 3.

7.15 The aim of the Streetscape Delivery Process is to facilitate a coordinated approach to public realm across the city. The process will be reviewed in the light of this strategy, and revised as necessary.

8 **OBJECTIVE 3: TO DEVELOP PRIORITIES FOR INVESTMENT IN THE PUBLIC REALM**

8.1 This Strategy aims to deliver positive changes to Edinburgh’s public realm. However, this will require significant investment and will take time to realise. The Strategy should be viewed as a long term vision which recognises the importance of the public realm as a catalyst for regeneration, builds on the existing good work that has already been done, and which seeks to deliver an improved public realm across the city.
8.2 This document seeks to set out initial priorities that can be delivered from an early date and will still contribute significantly to the overall strategy.

8.3 The city centre will inevitably remain the focus for strategic public realm improvements both to support the tram, and to add value to the economic regeneration of the city centre, as set out in the String of Pearls project. Due to the high footfall and the need to maintain the city centre as Edinburgh’s the economic and social hub, the public realm remains of paramount importance.

8.4 There are a number of public realm projects coming forward, either through Council led initiatives or through regeneration projects that require private sector or partner organisation’s support. To maximise the benefits of the work undertaken so far and to encourage further improvement, the Action Plan highlights key areas for investment. In linking these new areas of development with high quality public realm improvements the Council will not only knit the new development into the existing fabric of the city, but will also establish the coherent and coordinated public realm to which it aspires.

8.5 The strategy aims to deliver a consistent public realm approach across the whole city and recognises that local improvement projects can also have a significant impact. To this end, a series of comprehensive plans have been completed at the Neighbourhood level to guide future public realm investment outwith the City Centre. Built on extensive community consultation, many of these plans feature key routes into the City Centre, enhancing linkages through local centres of economic activity. In acknowledging these linkages it can be ensured that the public realm strategy is comprehensive, inclusive and strategic in its aspirations.

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13 City Centre Princes Street Development Framework - 4 October 2007 and Princes Street (Blocks 1-7a) Development Briefs – 14 May 2009 CEC
8.6 Community driven projects can also play a major role in ensuring the strategy is comprehensive and inclusive. For example the Causey\textsuperscript{14}, as part of the Six Cities Design Festival, saw architects in conjunction with the Southside Community Group, temporarily close the area around West Crosscauseway to traffic to give the space back to public and pedestrian use, in order to ascertain how people reacted to the changed space. The Council is keen to explore this idea further and develop other demonstration projects with community groups.

8.7 It is highly likely, due to the long term nature of the Strategy, that priorities will change over time. Therefore to assist in determining the need for, and establishing the value of, a piece of public realm work it is proposed to develop a method of evaluating and auditing proposals.

8.8 By setting out priorities the Council can ensure a coordinated and coherent approach to public realm improvements, as and when funding becomes available.

9 \textbf{OBJECTIVE 4: TO DEVELOP AN APPROACH TO PUBLIC REALM FUNDING}

9.1 Over the past decade, public realm in Edinburgh has been funded in various ways. For the most part, large public realm schemes like the High Street, Castle Street and Grassmarket have been funded through a partnership involving central government and local authority funds or through developer funding on larger schemes such as Quartermile and Holyrood North. The recent \textit{capital streets} programme was funded by a central government allocation to local authorities (through the Cities Growth Fund) and a matching contribution from Scottish Enterprise. This £17m fund covered the costs of Castle Street, St Andrew Square and the Grassmarket.

\textsuperscript{14} www.artinarchitecture.co.uk/Site_2/The_Causey.html
9.2 Prior to that, the work to the High Street, carried out in the mid 1990s was funded by a combination of local authority and Scottish Enterprise monies. On other occasions, major schemes have been funded solely by the local authority. Where this has occurred, it has often been the result of ‘windfall’ funds. This was the case in Lothian Road where a £1m scheme was quickly delivered, largely as a result of opportunity.

9.3 The cost of public realm work ranges from £350 - £600 per sq m. depending on whether it is simply paving replacement or a comprehensive treatment. By investing in public realm, the Council will send out a positive message, assisting in regeneration and continuing to attract inward investment. Whilst there may be occasional Government funding associated with specific initiatives that will assist with a funding package, there remains a need to develop a locally sourced funding mechanism.

9.4 Public sector funding is likely to remain a key component for the delivery of schemes, but innovative approaches involving partnership with the private sector are likely to be the way ahead in the current economic climate. Experience from other local authorities suggests that some form of developer contribution or new financial models will allow a more coherent and consistent flow of funds into public realm. The Council also recognises the need to better coordinate its own funding streams to support key projects, especially where there is an opportunity of partnership funding.

9.5 At present, a number of developers are willing and, at times, eager to fund improvements to the public realm within and immediately outside their development and this has been pivotal in achieving high standards and delivering quality in certain locations. However, success has been piecemeal and an approach is needed whereby the local authority and the private sector can work in partnership to improve the public realm in a coherent and planned manner across all sectors of the city.
9.6 The Edinburgh City Local Plan allows for the introduction of developer contribution for the improvement of the public realm through Policy Des 3.

“Development will be permitted where it is demonstrated that:
• A contribution to the improvement of the public realm in the vicinity has been considered, for example, through its redesign or the provision of public art.”

9.7 It is proposed that a detailed assessment be carried out to find the most appropriate mechanism for developing a public realm fund. This will look at developer contributions and alternative financial models to ensure whatever emerges is the best fit for Edinburgh. However, it is recognised that whatever approach is settled upon, an approved strategy and a list of detailed priority schemes requires to be in place.

10 OBJECTIVE 5: TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE BY FOLLOWING AND SHARING BEST PRACTICE.

10.1 Edinburgh aims to achieve excellence:
• by having the appropriate guidance in place,
• by having a process that ensures a co-ordinated approach to public realm,
• by developing high quality public realm schemes that are maintained to a high standard, and
• by being innovative in its thinking and delivery
• by evaluating outcomes to ensure best practice