



City of Edinburgh Council

Leith Connections: Qualitative research (Wave 1) to explore views of parents, those with accessibility needs and socially disadvantaged

April 2023



Leith
Connections



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Background & objectives

In March 2021 City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) launched its City Mobility Plan (CMP) with the objective of developing the city's transport system to make it safer, more inclusive and more sustainable. The CMP is a key element of the Council's commitment to achieve net zero by 2030.

One of the core elements of the plan is to 'reduce car dependency, promote active travel and increase the quality of public spaces'. Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) schemes were proposed as part of the strategy to deliver on this objective and Leith was identified as an appropriate area to pilot these proposals.

Within Leith, CEC plans to deliver segregated cycling infrastructure; complementary measures, such as improved pedestrians crossings, footways and new placemaking areas with seating and planting; and measures to reduce through traffic. Some measures will be introduced on a trial basis.



The impact of the development plans for Leith is being measured and monitored in a variety of ways, including surveys with Leith residents, businesses and users of local shops and businesses. CEC also commissioned Progressive to conduct qualitative research to complement the findings from the quantitative surveys.

Three waves of qualitative research will be conducted, aiming to:

- explore people's awareness of the project and its aims and objectives
- understand views of local streets before and after LTN measures have been introduced
- provide feedback on what people would change about the measures introduced.

This report outlines findings from the first wave of qualitative research conducted in February 2023.

Method and sample

- Three focus group discussions were conducted online using Zoom.
- Two in-depth interviews were also conducted with visually impaired respondents – one online using Zoom and one by telephone.
- The research was conducted with the following target audiences:

- Respondents were recruited using Progressive’s qualitative recruiters in the target locations, via social media and through schools/community groups.
- Fieldwork took place between 21st February and 6th March 2023.
- Please note that, due to the small sample sizes involved and the methods of respondent selection, qualitative research findings do not provide statistically robust data. However, this type of research does facilitate valid and extremely valuable consumer insight and understanding.

Target audience	No.
Group 1: Parents Children in P5-S1 attending schools within the LTN area	4
Group 2: Accessibility needs Live in/near the LTN area, if not living within the area visited at least a couple of times a month. Included a mix of needs, e.g., wheelchair, need assistance walking, etc.	9
Group 3: Socially disadvantaged Live in LTN area, in the lowest 20% SIMD postcodes and/or DE socio-economic group	5
Total no. respondents	18

Life in Leith



Life in Leith

- The research included a mix of born and bred Leithers, people who had lived in the area for many years, and relative newcomers who had more recently moved in.
- There was a consensus that Leith has a strong community spirit, with people knowing their neighbours well. Respondents cited meeting people they know when out and about as a positive about living in Leith.
- There was noted to have been many changes in the area over the years, with more recent years being marred by road and tram works making getting around the area difficult.
- Other benefits of living in and around Leith were:
 - Community spirit and a diverse mix of local residents
 - Good transport links
 - Walking distance to city centre
 - Close to beach/sea and good public parks (e.g. Leith Links)
 - Everything you need is in the local area – shops, services, cafes, restaurants and bars
 - Don't need to have a car to reach local amenities.
- The main negatives noted were:
 - Traffic congestion – particularly on Great Junction Street
 - Anti-social behaviour – especially amongst young people and around Kirkgate and Foot of the Walk
 - Tram works – especially on Leith Walk.

Life in Leith

- Most respondents reported that they usually walk to shops and services in Leith. Some respondents also reported that they regularly cycle in and around Leith.
- Only a minority said they use buses regularly within Leith – this was mainly because it’s quicker to walk due to traffic congestion and roadworks in the area.
- Respondents use their car when they need to do a ‘big shop’, to drop kids at school, and when running errands and time is short; however, those with mobility issues more often need to use their car to access local shops and services.
- Respondents with mobility issues reported that walking around Leith can be very challenging:
 - Many parked cars, which are difficult to pass when trying to cross the road if in a wheelchair or if using another mobility aid
 - Negotiating kerbs
 - People parking in disabled spaces
 - Difficulty finding a parking space due to congestion
 - Roadworks mean more physical barriers to negotiate and pavements can be narrowed.

Awareness of Leith Connections



Leith Connections – awareness and views on the concept



- There was low awareness of the Leith Connections project amongst respondents in all groups.
- A minority in the accessibility group said the description of the project “rang a bell”, mentioning seeing signs near Commercial Street, stalls at the market in Leith and posts on social media.
- Some of these respondents reported that they had looked it up online to find out more.
- Awareness of the term ‘low traffic neighbourhood’ was also relatively low, although some had a sense that it was about restricted access to streets for cars, ensuring amenities in walking distance of where people live and reducing emissions. There was also some confusion with Low Emission Zones, with people talking about only certain types of cars being allowed and people having to invest in newer cars.
- When the concept of a LTN was described to respondents, there were mixed responses – some respondents welcomed the idea of fewer cars in the area, while others had concerns.
- Most respondents liked the idea of a LTN in Leith:
 - Could lead to better public transport within and to the area
 - Good for young families – safer environment
 - Buses would be more efficient if they can use streets not congested by cars – people would be more likely to use them
- The key concerns for respondents are detailed over.

Leith Connections – awareness and views on the concept



- However, some were concerned about parking being reduced, when parking is already very difficult in the area. Respondents mentioned new flats being built with not enough parking for residents.
- Many respondents also raised the issue that the LTN could lead to more congestion on surrounding streets, which are already very busy.
- Some were also concerned about the further extension of the trams network into Leith – this might be good in the long run, but in the short term it causes a lot of disruption.
- In the accessibility group, there was concern about not being able to walk far and needing to use a car.
- Pedestrians sharing the same space as cyclists is a particular concern, for both sighted people and those with a vision impairment – this is dangerous because vision impaired people cannot see or hear the approach of a bike and are therefore more vulnerable to accidents.

Leith Connections – awareness and views on the concept

I don't know what an LTN is supposed to be. It depends on the details... I would take my kids out more in the area, they would be safer.

Female, parent

Make residents aware of the timelines of it all, why it's happening and what is happening, then it'll make people more positive.

Female, socially disadvantaged

I would have loved it when my kids were younger. Less traffic, freedom for them to walk and play about, without the worry of them being knocked down.

Female, socially disadvantaged

We might actually be able to use the public transport to get around, will be a lot safer as well with less vehicles on the road.

Male, socially disadvantaged

What happens when you can't walk and you need your car?

Female, accessibility needs

Great concept, but might be more difficult in practice. People have a variety of needs.

Male, accessibility needs

I think it's very positive, all bus routes around Leith gets you everywhere, would be good to use them and not have the congestion.

Female, socially disadvantaged

Views of proposals: roads and streets



Views of proposals – traffic operations, roads and crossings



- Responses to the map of the LTN and visuals of roads and streets were generally cautiously positive. People liked the idea of the LTN area and the proposed improvements to roads and crossings; however, there were concerns about how it would be implemented at a practical level.
- Positively, making the area more pleasant for people walking was welcomed. Many currently walk in Leith regularly so the improvements would make this experience safer and more enjoyable.
- Most respondents also liked the idea of the cycle path and hoped it would encourage more people to travel actively – although within the groups few said it would change their own behaviours.
- Those who currently cycle hoped that the cycle path would make cycling in Leith safer and more enjoyable. For these respondents more cycle racks would also be welcomed to encourage cycling.
- Seating areas were also broadly welcomed – creating areas where people can stop, rest, socialise and enjoy being outdoors.

Views of proposals – traffic operations, roads and crossings

It will encourage active travel, it will be a good thing. If they want to encourage cycling, they should put bike racks and repair stations.

Male, parent

I'd maybe get a bike for travelling into work. I'd feel more comfortable cycling round.

Male, socially disadvantaged

I do have a bike, but it's the time to get to A to B, because of working hours. I would love to walk or cycle. I could maybe cycle to work if this happened.

Female, parent

The area would be nicer and safer to walk in... all the areas around that [Leith Links] are really congested already, there is always a traffic jam. The area is lovely and would be less pollution near the park, would use the area more, but around about it might be a nightmare on a bus or car. Where's the traffic going?

Female, socially disadvantaged

People always panic when there is change, but they're trying to make it safer, more inviting for people to be out. I think it's a positive.

Female, socially disadvantaged

It's a good idea, but it'll be frustrating at the initial stage. Less reasons for people to drive their cars, free of a lot of pollution, will look nice as well.

Female, socially disadvantaged

Views of proposals – traffic operations, roads and crossings



- There were a number of key concerns about the proposals for changes to traffic operations, roads and crossings:
 - The width of the road on Great Junction Street does not seem to be not be wide enough to accommodate a cycle path as depicted on the visual.
 - Many worried about the floating bus stop on the Great Junction Street visual – they were worried about having to cross the cycle lane to reach the bus stop, and about stepping off the bus almost directly into the cycle lane. Some had seen accidents occur and near misses on Leith Walk due to this issue. Again this was a particular concern for people with accessibility needs.
 - Closing some streets to traffic will just displace it onto other already very congested streets.
 - Not enough disabled parking.
 - LEZ in the city centre might mean more traffic in surrounding areas like Leith – further adding to congestion.
 - The cycle lane in the middle of Sandport Bridge is likely to increase danger of collisions between cyclists and pedestrians – this was a particular concern for people with accessibility needs, including visual impairments. This would be better positioned to one side of the bridge with clear demarcation from pedestrian walking area.
 - Need to ensure there are definite kerbs for people with vision impairments. The way the cycle lane has been designed on Leith Walk does not provide this and has proven dangerous, both for people with a vision impairment and also for others too.
 - Some had concerns about the disruption while the works are being carried out – especially as they have endured so much roadwork disruption for tram works in recent years.

Views of proposals – traffic operations, roads and crossings

Still have the bus stops on the pavements, so you're not having to cross any cycle paths. Do the same as in Craigmillar, use a bit of curb and it's fine... the bus stop has markings and it is clear and doesn't interfere with the cycle paths. Use simple designs.

Female, accessibility needs

If they are making a cycle lane, they'll put bollards there so it'll be another road closure while they do it.

Male, socially disadvantaged

I think it looks great, but wish I had faith in it. I'd like to see it happen, good for me as I walk. It would be nice to walk through.

Female, accessibility needs

It's a good idea, but it'll be frustrating at the initial stage... less reasons for people to drive their cars, free of a lot of pollution, will look nice as well.

Female, socially disadvantaged

I don't think it'll work. I don't use my car often, less than once a week, but that area for services might be more difficult to get to. I would have to get a tram or bus, but for appointments it might be difficult.

Female, accessibility needs

The cycle lane up the middle of the bridge, kids running across it, and cycle lane from Water of Leith, have to cross past pedestrians.

Male, accessibility needs

Leith is congested, people live for their cars... it will just put people onto the main roads. They're trying to reduce cars, trying to introduce EV infrastructure. The city needs this for the future.

Male, accessibility needs

Views of proposals: Cycle path



Views on cycle route proposals

- The cycle route was welcomed by people who currently cycle in Leith, although some were unsure of the value of connecting the Foot of the Walk to Commercial Street.
- Others broadly welcomed the idea of a cycle route which could encourage more people to cycle; however, there was concern about the impact on road congestion.
- Both cyclists and non-cyclists were concerned that the cycle route needs to have a clear demarcation between the pavement and the cycle path. Both groups fear accidents if cyclists and pedestrians are occupying a mixed/shared space.
- Some also commented on the cycling/walking experience being impaired if the cycle route is not clearly separated from pavements, i.e. cyclists have to constantly be on the look out for and avoiding pedestrians, and pedestrians have to be careful not to get in the way of cyclists.
- This issue has been made apparent to respondents who have used Leith Walk since the cycle path has been introduced there. There was a strong desire to ensure that this model of a shared space for cyclists and pedestrians is not repeated in Leith – particularly amongst vision impaired people, but also amongst most other respondents, including those who cycle, have children, etc.

Views on cycle path proposals

I cycled all my life, until my accident, and I wouldn't go that way. You'd just go to the cycle path on Water of Leith... cyclists don't mix with people on their phones and it's difficult to get about. They need a lane of their own.

Male, accessibility needs

I don't cycle as I'm not confident enough, but this would make me way more confident. I feel that on Leith walk, people don't realise there is a strip on the pavement for cyclists, always standing in the way. This [the visual shown] is great, clearly laid out, everybody has their own space and it's much safer.

Female, socially disadvantaged

It all comes down to signage, usually get the bike painted on the ground. If you didn't have cyclists on that picture [Sandport Bridge] you wouldn't know which part was which. It needs to be clearly signposted or painted on the ground.

Male, socially disadvantaged

Views of proposals: public realm



Views on changes to public realm spaces

- Again, most respondents welcomed the proposed changes to the public realm spaces.
- More seating would provide pleasant areas for people to sit and rest, to talk to friends, etc.
- For people with mobility issues, seating areas are particularly important – they often need somewhere to stop and rest when out walking and currently such facilities are in short supply.
- Parents also liked the idea of having somewhere they could stop with their children for a rest or a snack.
- Suggestion to ensure that the look of these areas is unique to Leith – make it distinct from other public realm spaces around Edinburgh, by using local artists for public art. It should reflect the character and style of the Leith community.

- However, there was widespread concern that whilst such improvements look good when first installed, they can quickly deteriorate if not properly maintained.
 - Suggested planting trees to create green spaces rather than using planters, as they need less maintenance.
- There was also concern that the public realm spaces might attract anti-social behaviour – with people drinking and hanging around during the day and in the evening.
- Some minority scepticism that the improvements are not for people living in Leith but for visitors/tourists.
- Some also questioned the cost of the improvements and felt that the Council should be using budgets to support communities in different ways during the cost of living crisis.

Views on changes to public realm spaces

Brilliant, more seating. Benches with a back on them, not modern benches, so you can rest.

Female, parent

I'd probably use the area more, like the idea of having seats near the water. I like the idea of the rain garden too.

Male, socially disadvantaged

I don't see the point of John's Place bit. In a cost of living crisis, surely the council has better things to spend their money on. A lot of it is aesthetic, not a necessity.

Male, accessibility needs

The benches are a great idea. I often have to lean on a wall when I get tired, so benches dotted around is good. We need them where people wander near the main roads near the Shore.

Female, accessibility needs

It looks nice and inviting, bring the art work to life. It's got that edgy cosmopolitan vibe... invites people to wander down and go to the shops and cafes, all positive.

Female, socially disadvantaged

My concern is that having these spaces would encourage the 'less desirables' to hang out and gives them a space to enjoy... more places that people can cause mischief.

Female, parent

It will make me go out more, working from home I need an excuse to go out, need something to push me out every day. With the area looking as nice as the pictures, something I'd love to do, sit outside have a picnic.

Female, socially disadvantaged

These things are not for people in Leith, they are for the tourists. Too many people that don't care about it, it won't be maintained.

Female, accessibility needs

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Views of proposals: vision impaired people

Particular considerations for people with visual impairments



- Discussions with people with vision impairments highlighted a number of specific needs to be taken into consideration in the design of the roads, pavements and public realm spaces.
- Clear kerbs are needed to allow detection of pavement edge, for both cycle lanes and roads. Both guide dogs users and those who use a visual aid (stick) require a clear edge between pavement and road.
- Further clear demarcation of cycle lanes and roads using colours and tactile indications would also be welcomed.
- When using colours on pavements at corners or crossings, it should be yellow – red is not visible for vision impaired people in the dark.
- Anything painted on the pavement must be non-reflective (can dazzle when the sun shines on it), avoid mosaics, and use plain structures.
- Avoid floating bus stops where pedestrians have to cross a cycle lane to reach them. One respondents noted that it is possible to put a bus stop next to the pavement and still accommodate a cycle lane – in Craigmillar area this has been successfully implemented.
- Be mindful of taking away parking, as it can push people to park on pavements, which then becomes an obstacle for people with both visions impairments and those who use mobility aids.
- Think about positioning of pavement furniture, such as planters and benches. These can be difficult for guide dogs to get around.
- The construction phase can be particularly difficult for people with a vision impairment and they requested that it be completed as quickly as possible.
- Avoid regularly moving crossing points during construction phase – guide dogs are taught preferred crossing points and if these change regularly it is confusing for them.
- Similarly, avoid forcing pedestrians into road space during construction, as its very difficult for people with vision impairments and guide dogs to negotiate.

Particular considerations for people with visual impairments

We want to be able to go out and live a very independent life, we rely on public transport but we do a lot of independent walking, I don't have the luxury of jumping in a car. If a wee bit of thought is put into the structure, the materials, and the layout, then that enables me and others.

Female, vision impaired

Leith walk is really bad, there's no colour contrast... couldn't even feel either, guide dogs take you from kerb to kerb, they take you to what they think a kerb is, then you're actually going onto a cycle lane before you can cross over.

Female, vision impaired

People moan they have nowhere to park... they then park on pavements which hinders me. Drivers will always find somewhere to put their cars, they're not going to give up their cars.

Female, vision impaired

You can't argue with the principle of it [LTN], but the man issue is the cycle track. On Leith Walk it's on the pavement... you can easily drift into the cycle lane.

Male, vision impaired

When you have to cross the cycle lane to get to the bus stop it's much more difficult. You can't rely on the guide dog to stop as it's not clearly a road... it increases the potential for mistakes and accidents.

Male, vision impaired

Listening to people with disabilities or health conditions can actually make society a bit more equal and give them a better quality of life and it has economic implications, they can go shopping on their own, meet friends for meals as well.

Female, vision impaired

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Overall opinions of development plans

Overall opinions of proposals

- For the majority of respondents, opinions of the Leith Connections proposals were cautiously positive.
- There was a general view that if the proposed alterations to roads, crossings, pavements and public spaces are implemented and maintained to the high standards depicted in the visuals, then people who live, visit and work in Leith will see good improvements in the area for walking, cycling and wheeling.
- The research highlighted some key caveats, that residents would like to be considered in the development of the plans:
 - Cycle paths and pavements must be clearly separated from each other.
 - Public realm improvements must be well maintained in the future to ensure they retain the positive impact on the local area.
 - Public realm areas should not be allowed to become gathering areas for people drinking and anti-social behaviour.
 - Traffic that can no longer use closed roads must be carefully managed to avoid displacing congestion and pollution onto other nearby streets.
 - The concerns of people with accessibility needs should be borne in mind in the design.
 - The construction phase must be carefully managed to ensure minimal disruption to local residents (who have already enduring a protected period of roadworks/construction due to the tram extension).
- A minority expressed a more negative view, stating that Council resources would be better spent in other ways during the current cost of living crisis.
- Some were also concerned that car drivers would be pushed out of the area with limited access and parking.
- Amongst respondents, expectations that the improvements would change their own travel behaviours were fairly limited; however, respondents did acknowledge that the LTN could lead to higher levels of walking and cycling in the future.

Overall opinions of proposals

I probably would get out a bit more and I'd feel safer and when my daughter gets old enough to go out, she'll be safer as well.
Male, accessibility needs

I think that there are certain areas are horrible to be on foot because of noise and pollution. It would encourage me to walk there, feel like I'm getting away from the traffic... would be really nice, feel more peaceful, and more likely to take friends and family who visit, could go for dinner near the shore.
Male, socially disadvantaged

It's a nicety not a necessity... putting more traffic onto main roads, I think it's a waste of money. It will get vandalised, graffitied, destroyed maybe. It's an ideal world, but not the real world.
Male, accessibility needs

It will definitely make me take longer walks and come out more to experience the nice area, other than that I wouldn't do anything different. It would just make me walk more.
Female, socially disadvantaged

It's a positive thing, getting out and the fresh air will help all of our health and will help the NHS as well. Again, usual worries for the car owners, parking, congestion moving into already congested areas, how do people drive in Leith.
Female, socially disadvantaged

I've got no qualms with improving the environment and making it nice for people, that's great in theory, in practice it is a completely different thing. My concern is, if I was a car owner, do I have get rid of my car?
Male, socially disadvantaged

It's a lovely idea, but not top of the list of what the people of Leith need... small area of Leith as well. There is greater need for money elsewhere for pavements and accessibility.
Female, accessibility needs

It will be a nice idea, improve active travel, reduce congestion. People might not accept it easily, but they might get used to it.
Male, parent

Communications



Legend
- - Foot of the Walk to Cycle
Terminal cycle route
Low Traffic Neighbourhood

Leith Connections, Low Traffic Neighbourhood; Project Area



Visualisation looking south on John's Place

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sustrans
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Low Traffic Neighbourhood

Share your views

Complete our survey and sign up for workshops
23 June or 1 July, 6.30-8pm



consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/ltic/low-traffic-neighbourhoods



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Communications



- Respondents were shown a variety of communications that have been distributed around Leith about the Leith Connections project – leaflet, lamppost banner, social media posts, posters and images from pop-up stall at Leith market.
- The majority of respondents had low awareness of these communications. A small number thought they may have seen the leaflet, while others remembered the drop in event, the lamppost banners and social media posts.
- Respondents expressed that they would like to be kept informed about the development of the LTN area, so for them communications are important.
- A variety of channels were suggested, including direct emails, leaflets in local services and shops, social media/online and through schools.
- Respondents with vision impairments asked to be considered in communications, as they often won't see things on social media.
- Apps tend to work better, as they can be set to vibrate when an alert comes in.
- Suggested setting up an app for residents to keep them informed of progress in the development, as well as updates on changes to road/pavement closures as they happen.

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Summary and conclusions

Summary and conclusions

Respondents were generally positive about the concept of a LTN and the specific Leith Connections proposals.

They welcomed anything that would improve the environment in Leith and reduce traffic. They were also attracted to the concept of people walking, cycling and wheeling more for environmental reasons, and saw this as a first step to achieving that goal.

However, they have concerns about how the changes will be implemented practically.

Concerns included how the construction phase would be managed, the design of the cycle path and the long term maintenance of public realm spaces. Residents need to be reassured on the details of these aspects of the proposals.

The needs of people with accessibility issues must be integral to the design.

People with mobility and vision impairments expressed specific concerns about the proposals, although most were very positive about the overall concept of a LTN.

Recall of communications was low.

This may be a result of the time lapse since leaflets, posters, etc. were last circulated, but it will be important to keep residents informed of the plans and timelines as the proposals are implemented to maintain support.

Thank you

The logo for Progressive Partnership, featuring the word "progressive" in a lowercase, sans-serif font inside a solid olive-green circle.

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Technical appendix

- The data was collected by focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.
- The target groups for this research study were: parents of P5-S1s, those with accessibility needs, and socially disadvantaged groups living in/near the Leith LTN area.
- In total, 3 group discussions and 2 in-depth interviews were undertaken. A total of 18 respondents took part in the research.
- Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st February and 6th March 2023.
- Respondents were recruited face to face by Progressive's skilled qualitative recruiters, via social media, through schools/community groups and through relevant charities.
- Our Operations team manage recruitment to ensure quota controls were met and that the final sample reflected the requirements of the project.
- An incentive of £40 compensated respondents for their time.
- In total, 2 moderators were involved in the fieldwork for this project.
- Stimulus materials were used during the group discussions/depth interviews. These included maps and visualisations of the proposed features of the LTN.
- Each recruiter's work is validated as per the requirements of the international standard ISO 20252. Therefore, all respondents were subject to validation, either between recruitment and the date of the group discussion/depth interview, or on the day of the group discussion/depth interview. Validation involved respondents completing a short questionnaire asking pertinent profile questions and checking that they have not participated in similar research in the past 6 months.
- It should be noted that, due to the small sample sizes involved and the methods of respondent selection, qualitative research findings do not provide statistically robust data. This type of research does however, facilitate valid and extremely valuable consumer insight and understanding.
- All research projects undertaken by Progressive comply fully with the requirements of ISO 20252.