

Charlotte Square Public Realm Enhancement

Stage 2 Engagement Summary (Interim and Concept Designs)

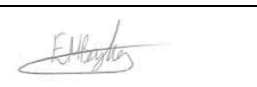
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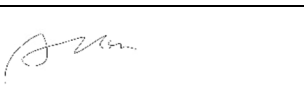
Prepared by

Elliot Bayley
Consultant



Checked by

Andy Keba
Associate Director



Approved by

Nick Webster
Technical Director



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Prepared for:

City of Edinburgh Council

Prepared by:

AECOM Limited
1 Tanfield
Edinburgh EH3 5DA
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)131 301 8600
aecom.com

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Objectives

The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC), in partnership with Sustrans, has commissioned AECOM and Optimised Environments (OP-EN) to develop improvements to Charlotte Square to create an attractive, welcoming space and experience for anyone walking, wheeling or cycling to visit and enjoy the area.

Charlotte Square is not only about improving this important part of Edinburgh's New Town and World Heritage Site, it also supports the City Centre Transformation strategy, City Mobility Plan and drive to net zero, connecting several key active travel cycling and walking routes including:

- City Centre West East Link (CCWEL);
- George Street and First New Town;
- Meadows to George Street; and
- Future links to Lothian Road and North Edinburgh.

Figure 1 below shows the context and planned active travel network in the city centre.



Figure 1: Charlotte Square and wider active travel routes.

The goal is to create a quiet and safe environment that will overcome many of the barriers to walking, cycling, and wheeling, by considering measures such as:

- widening and addressing inaccessible footways due to pavement levels
- adding new and improving existing pedestrian crossings
- creating quiet dwell zones
- installing segregated cycle paths on main roads
- connecting key parts of the Edinburgh cycle network
- providing alternative routes avoiding tram lines.

The project will also accommodate the need for security features associated with the First Minister's residence at Bute House, which are required to be sympathetically incorporated into the design, given the square's location within a UNESCO world heritage site.

An initial (Stage 1) engagement process was undertaken in 2023/2024 involving engagement with a targeted set of stakeholders with updates on the project to residents and businesses. The feedback from this stage was used to inform developing designs and frame further engagement at Stage 2 (Concept Design). This report summarises the outcomes from Stage 2 engagement undertaken in June 2024, focused on engaging with a wide array of stakeholders, residents and businesses on the proposed interim designs and concept designs, to gain feedback on the proposals through virtual and drop in sessions. The feedback gained through the engagement period will be used to help aid design development for future stages of the project.

1.2 Report Structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 2: Project Delivery and Proposals Summary
- Section 3: Engagement Approach
- Section 4: Engagement Activities
- Section 5: Engagement Responses
- Section 6: Summary and Next Steps

2. Project Delivery and Proposals Summary

Project Delivery

The project needs to be delivered in two phases to align with connecting projects.

Phase 1 – Interim Scheme (Spring/Summer 2024)

The CCWEL project has now been completed and connects to Charlotte Square from Randolph Place via an existing shared use route emerging at West Register House.

In Phase 1 the project will deliver an ‘interim’ version of the scheme by the end of Summer 2024 to provide a safer cycle route around the Square in particular connecting CCWEL project to George Street via Charlotte Street. The interim layout will be a lower-cost temporary layout utilising traffic restrictions and semi-permanent materials to achieve the CCWEL connection in advance of a permanent scheme. It will also include new signalised crossings on Charlotte Street to connect Charlotte Square to George Street and Rose Street more directly and comfortably, as part of a full refurbishment of the traffic signals on the Square.

Phase 2 – Permanent Scheme (2026)

Charlotte Square presents a unique opportunity to create a high-quality street environment in one of the city’s finest Squares for people to pass through, visit and spend time in. The design is being developed to deliver a project which protects and enhances the heritage of the Square and quality of the spaces by providing:

- new safe and accessible walking and cycling routes.
- new public spaces and landscape design.
- high quality materials.

This permanent scheme will share many of the same principles and complement the George Street and First New Town project, which are due to start in 2025-26, and together will transform the city centre.

Traffic Operations Review

Prior to the first Phase of the Charlotte Square project, feedback was obtained from stakeholders on the proposal shown below in **Figure 2**. A summary of this feedback is included in Chapter 4 of this report.

Following early engagement with key stakeholders, and data gathering on current traffic and street use, a number of scenarios were developed and modelled these to understand how changes to access will affect the wider road and public transport networks. The proposed changes to traffic operations include:

- potential restricted access to the northern and western sides to the Square; and
- public transport and two-way general traffic retained on the south side of the Square.

Restricting access to the west and north sides of the Square will enable quiet streets which are safe for cycling can be created and provides the opportunity to improve public spaces. The cycle route will connect to George Street via a new dedicated signalised crossing on Charlotte Street, with full details still to be developed.

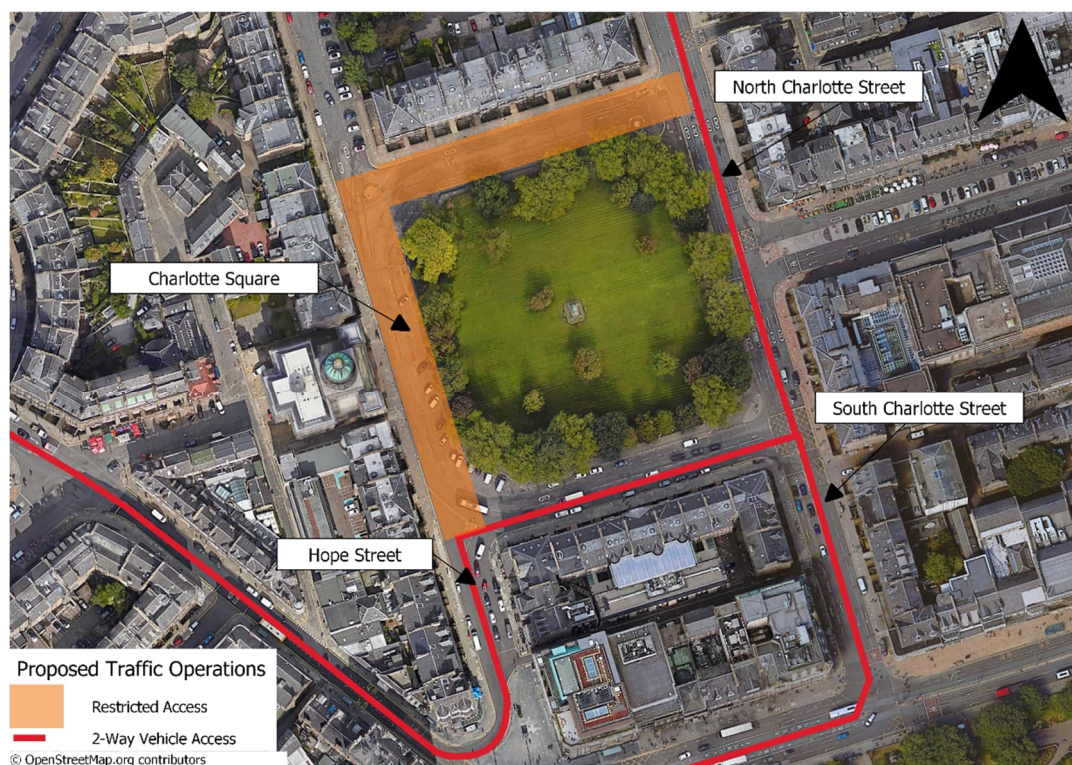


Figure 2: Proposed Traffic Operations for Vehicles

Concept Designs

During the concept design stage, two concept designs were developed, as illustrated in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** below.

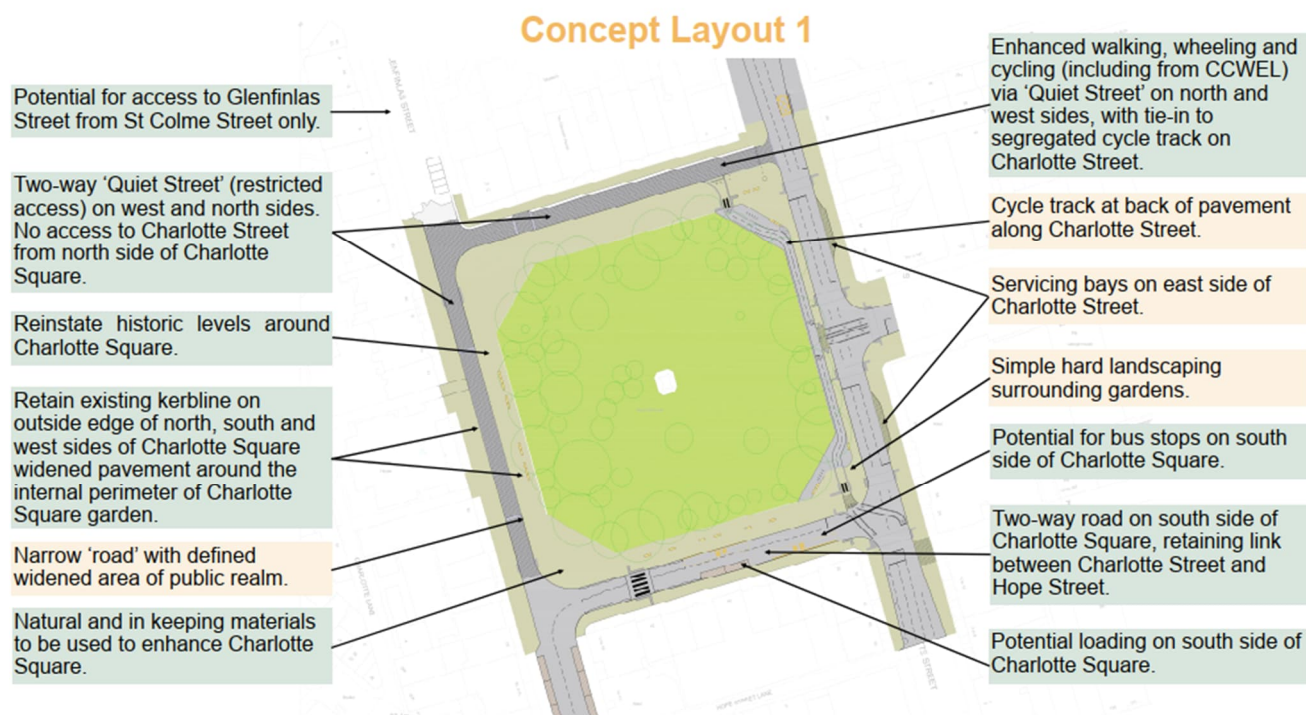


Figure 3: Concept Design 1

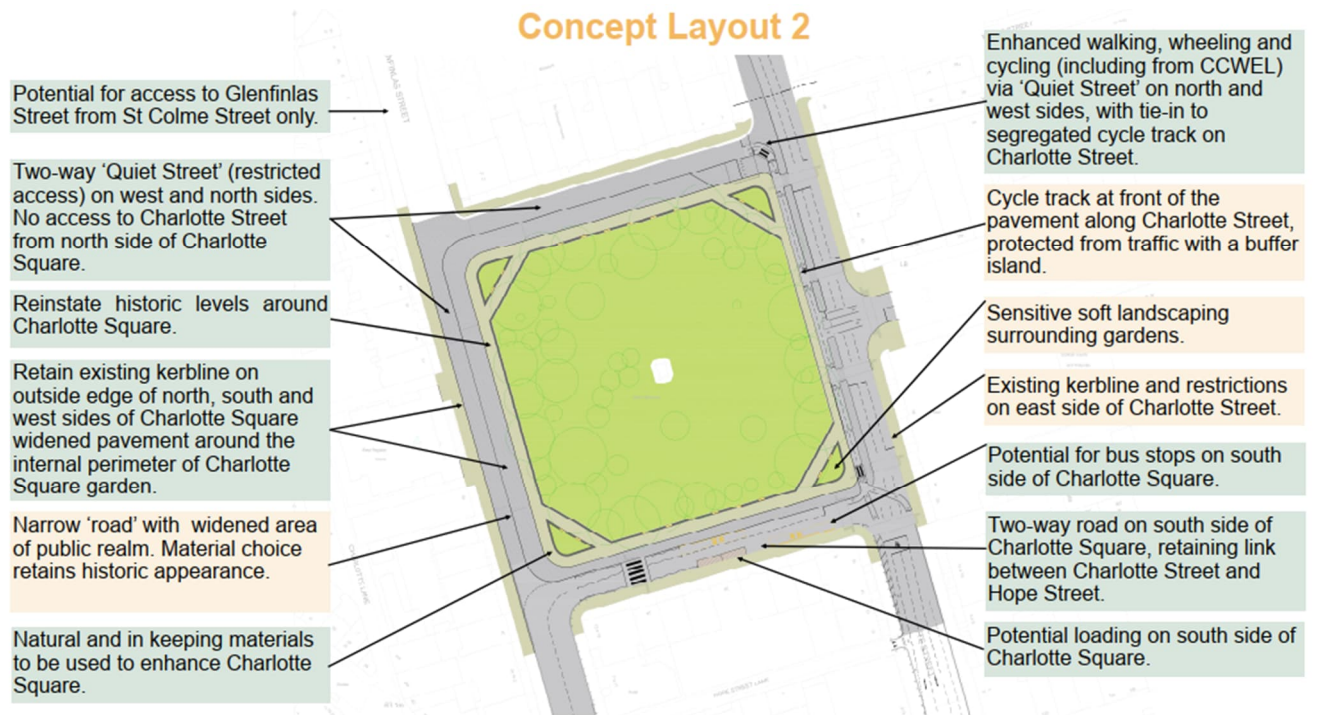


Figure 4: Concept Design 2

3. Engagement Approach

Due to the setting of the project within the historic character of the privately owned Square, and the potential influence this affords to a few key stakeholders, a staged approach has been taken to the engagement process, starting with key stakeholders and the proprietors of Charlotte Square during the early stages of the project before expanding to the wider stakeholder group and businesses. The forms of engagement undertaken are outlined in **Table 3-1** below.

Table 3-1: Forms of Engagement

Meeting with Businesses, and Proprietors	✓	Meetings were held with Businesses and Proprietors of Charlotte Square, outlining the designs and plans for the square.
Online Briefing with Key Stakeholders	✓	Local groups, including representatives EWH and the Proprietors group, were invited to a virtual meeting where an online presentation was given following by a question-and-answer session.
Pop-Up Engagement Session	✓	A drop-in session was held to obtain feedback on proposals for the permanent scheme concept designs alongside the interim scheme for Charlotte Square.
Email Notifications	✓	Email notifications were issued to all stakeholders and those who have registered an interest in the project, and a dedicated project email address was set up for feedback and queries.
Social Media	✓	Social media posts were created on Facebook, Twitter and the City of Edinburgh Council's project website.
Core Stakeholders	✓	During the engagement period continuous engagement has been ongoing with Bute House, Corran Estates and the Proprietors of Charlotte Square.

4. Engagement Activities

4.1 Stage 1 Engagement

Engagement during Stage 1 of the project included engaging with key stakeholders who are directly impacted by the operation and potential proposals for Charlotte Square, to provide them with an update on the traffic operations as well as gain feedback on the interim design. The table below provides a record of the key stakeholders who were engaged at Stage 1. The Stage 1 engagement technical note provides further details.

Stakeholder Name	Engagement Details
Corran Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved in previous Charlotte Square project in 2011-2014. Previously engaged by meeting on the 3rd April 2023. Provided with a project update via email on the 7th February 2024. Met to discuss the project and proposals for Charlotte Square on 11th March 2024.
Bute House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged through meeting 10th January 2023. Previously engaged via a project update via email (30th March 2023). Provided with a project update via email on the 7th February 2024.
Edinburgh World Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided with a project update via email. Held meeting to discuss the project and proposals for Charlotte Square (25th January 2024) Further direct engagement was held on the 27th February 2024. Ongoing monthly engagement with CEC is occurring including updates on Charlotte Square project as appropriate.
Spokes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> February 2024 email correspondence with project update. Feedback was provided by Spokes through email correspondence with CEC.
Residents and Business of the Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A letter drop was undertaken to all resident and businesses associated with the Square on (22nd February 2024).

In addition to these methods of engagement the CEC Project Website was also updated to reflect the latest project overview information to the public.

Key Feedback

Corran Properties:

The project team held a meeting with Corran Properties on 11th March 2024 to outline the proposed traffic operations and gain feedback on the designs for Charlotte Square. The following feedback was provided:

- There are 11 Proprietors associated with Charlotte Square, who were highlighted as a key group to engage with due to the impact of changes to the square on their operations. It was requested they should be contacted first before the wider stakeholders were engaged with.
***Action:** a meeting was subsequently set up for and held on the 24th of April with Corran Properties along with a further meeting in May with the wider Proprietors Association.*
- Traffic within the square was highlighted as a concern, mainly associated with Private Hire Coaches indiscriminately parking.
- Limiting access hours to properties would be unpopular with businesses and visitors. It was considered important that there is drop off access for vehicles outside the offices. Accessibility is key for client drop offs and delivery, with approximately six properties with access to the rear of the buildings.
- Glenfinlas Street access being relocated from Charlotte Street to St Colme Street was not viewed as an issue, retaining the restriction on rat-running.
- Maintenance of the soft landscaping was seen as a concern, primarily the potential for maintenance not to occur if budgets are not ringfenced. If budgets are reduced or withdrawn these landscaping elements could become overgrown detracting from the beauty of the gardens.

Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH):

- Placement of a cycle track in front of the eastern gates was opposed based on accessibility.
- If ramps are required for the interim scheme for accessibility, the noted preference would be to install them without wooden surrounds.
- There was concern about the proposed widening of the kerb line outside of West Register House.
- Noted EWH would welcome ongoing discussions as the scheme develops.

4.2 Stage 2 Engagement

Stage 2 engagement activities expanded to a wider audience with a broader set of engagement methods. Advertisement for events were coordinated through direct emails to stakeholders, updates to the project website, social media posts and emails to those who have requested to be kept up to date with the project. The engagement activities are summarised below.

Virtual Stakeholder Briefing

A Virtual Stakeholder Briefing session was held on Monday 3rd June 2024 at 10am until 11am. The event consisted of the project team providing a project overview, an update on the project timeline along with presenting the different concept designs for Charlotte Square and Charlotte Street. At the end of the presentation there was opportunities for attendees to provide feedback and ask questions to the project team. The following organisations were represented at this event:

Sight Scotland	Whighams Wine Bar
Coran Properties	City Link
National Trust Scotland	Spokes

In Person Drop-In Session

An in-person drop-in Session was held to allow key stakeholders, businesses and residents of Charlotte Square and the Proprietors the opportunity to speak to the project team, review the project material, ask questions, and provide feedback on the proposals for Charlotte Square and Charlotte Street. The event was held Kimpton Hotel, Charlotte Square on Wednesday 5th June 2024 at 4pm until 6:45pm.

Virtual Residents and Businesses Drop-In Session

A Virtual Briefing session was held on Thursday 6th June 2024 at 5pm until 6pm. The event consisted of the project team providing a project overview, an update on the project timeline along with presenting the concept designs for Charlotte Square and Charlotte Street. At the end of the presentation there was opportunities for attendees to provide feedback and ask questions to the project team. Attendees included residents and businesses around the square as well as wider stakeholders.

5. Engagement Responses

The following chapter provides a summary of the feedback gathered through the Stage 2 engagement events.

5.1 General Feedback

Table 5-1 summarises key areas raised during the engagement with a summary of key actions to consider during development of the proposed concept designs. In addition to this, the following, more general feedback was received:

- Apprehension over the visual impact on Charlotte Square and the surrounding streets from the vertical wands.
- Confusion was noted associated with the cycle track which has a lack of access for users (note this is to be opened as part of the interim scheme).
- Noted that vehicles turning right from Charlotte Street southbound to the south side of Charlotte Square are causing congestion due to the removal of the right filter lane.
- Noted that drivers can find it difficult turning left from George Street on to South Charlotte Street during busy times.
- Feedback highlighted the need to provide information on the current Charlotte Square arrangement to ensure all members of the public, alongside businesses and residents understand.

Positive feedback was received on the ideas and intentions presented during the engagement within the concept designs, most notably around the levelling of the square to help remove the current camber and promote a consistent level, increasing safety and accessibility for all users.

5.3 Concept Design Feedback Summary

Table 5-1: Specific Feedback from Stage 2 Consultation

Theme	Comments	Action
Design	Need clear differentiation between cycle track and crossing points for visually impaired people.	A clear vertical level difference is proposed between footways and the cycle track to highlight the different facilities.
	Zebra crossing on southside of the square is offset from the desire line.	The crossing has been located to provide requisite forward visibility between pedestrians and vehicle drivers away from the 90 degree bend at the southwest corner of Charlotte Square, maintaining on the desire line as far as possible
	Cycle track would be better served not being close to the square railings - need access to do maintenance.	The preferred concept design is under consideration taking into account feedback on the two overarching short-listed options.
	Glenfinlas Street should not be closed at the south, Charlotte Square end. As pointed out at the meeting, if access from St. Colme Street is allowed, buses will come into Glenfinlas Street to drop off then must reverse out making the street impassible.	The presented change is local to Glenfinlas Street residents to reduce the need for need for vehicles to be within Charlotte Square (west and north), whilst maintaining the inability to rat-run via St Colme Street/Glenfinlas Street. We will continue to engage with residents and re-examine the extent of resident parking on Glenfinlas Street alongside necessary waiting restrictions in consideration of the concerns over buses accessing Glenfinlas Street.
	Colour contrast of paving for delineation is needed to be considered and that it is consistent when moving on to George Street.	Noted, materials are still to be specified acknowledging the importance of vertical and/or colour differentiation for visually impaired people.
	Cycle Track outside of Bute House would be preferred.	The cycle route is to the north via Bute House in the 'Quiet Street' environment, connecting to the segregated cycle track on the west side of Charlotte Street.
	Laybys outside the Kimpton causing an issue.	The revised layout on Charlotte Street is being monitored, with the upcoming interim scheme clarifying the layout and lane discipline southbound.

Theme	Comments	Action
Congestion	Changing Glenfinlas Street is not a good idea as causes more traffic on Colme Street	The presented change is local to Glenfinlas Street residents to reduce the need for need for vehicles to be within Charlotte Square (west and north), whilst maintaining the inability to rat-run via St Colme Street/Glenfinlas Street. We will continue to engage with residents and re-examine the extent of resident parking on Glenfinlas Street alongside necessary waiting restrictions in consideration of the concerns over buses accessing Glenfinlas Street.
	The new road layout is causing significant traffic problems due to the reduction of lanes along Charlotte Street, which is having an impact on Queen Street.	The interim scheme has been trialling the reduction of road space on Charlotte Street to inform the public realm improvement project. Barriers have subsequently been removed to reduce the impact of southbound right turning vehicles (onto the south side of the Square) on through traffic. The layout will continue to be monitored.
Accessibility	Street furniture: would be good to have an understanding of where it would be located so that it doesn't cause an issue in terms of barriers for those who are visually impaired.	Street furniture types and locations are to be developed during subsequent design and engagement stages when the overall concept layout is approved.
	Need to ensure that those with disability can be dropped off. Clear signage regarding disabled parking needs to be provided.	The balance of parking/loading/public transport is being developed inclusive of feedback from engagement.
	Need to ensure that there is clear delineation between cyclists and pedestrians to protect those who are visually impaired or have other disabilities.	A clear vertical level difference is proposed between footways and the cycle track to highlight the different facilities.
Parking and Loading	Deliveries to the front doors of the businesses around Charlotte Square was essential	Deliveries to front doors of businesses on the square will still be possible.
	a desire to have more parking spaces for residents on Glenfinlas Street to mitigate against the loss of spaces on Charlotte Square	As part of this project re-examination of the ratio of pay & display bays to resident parking on Glenfinlas Street is proposed, alongside necessary waiting restrictions.

Theme	Comments	Action
	The provision of parking on the southside of Charlotte Square has the potential to cause congestion through the narrowing of the carriageway as well as lowering safety levels for those entering/exiting their vehicles.	The south side of Charlotte Square will remain as a vehicle route from Charlotte Street to Hope Street to service bus routes, loading and access. Short term loading/drop off is proposed for the west/north sides of the square but to be carefully incorporated into the public realm scheme.
Public Realm	What safeguards will be put in place to ensure the public realm space is kept as that and not for events space.	CEC operate a permit system for any events, requiring detailed applications that must be reviewed and approved by relevant authorities to ensure compliance with usage policies.
	Concerns around the potential soft landscaping around the corners of the square. Who will maintain those areas to ensure they do not get overgrown or filled with litter?	Through the Tourist Levy for Edinburgh proposals, budgets are currently being investigated for ringfenced maintenance of key public realm spaces in the city centre.

6. Summary and Next Steps

6.1 Summary

A variety of engagement methods have been employed in order to maximise the opportunity for feedback. Engagement has been undertaken on the emerging concept design options in particular with key stakeholders including Corran Properties, Bute House, Residents and Businesses of The Square as well as other key stakeholders such as Edinburgh World Heritage and Spokes. The feedback provided to the wider project team from these organisations, as well as members of the public, will be valuable in helping to develop the current designs to improve Charlotte Square for all users. These designs will also look to ensure that the proposed changes to the Square are accepted by the main users such as residents and businesses, as well as Edinburgh World Heritage, whilst meeting council objectives. The main areas of feedback focused on 5 main themes: Design, Congestion, Accessibility, Parking and Loading and Public Realm.

6.2 Next Steps

During Stage 3 of the project, a preferred option will be developed including where possible the feedback from the recent engagement; this engagement will continue during the Preliminary Design phase to ensure a balanced solution for the Charlotte Square Public Realm project. Engagement will be undertaken with residents and businesses, Bute House, Corran Properties and wider stakeholders to ensure the views of all users of the space are taken into account in the development of the final design. Once this stage has occurred the project team will move from Preliminary Design to the Detailed Design stage, with the aim to have the permanent scheme in place in 2026.

