



PICARDY PLACE: THE NEED FOR A NEW VISION

Stop being traffic planners; become urban designers

Summary Position

The Cockburn Association does not support the Council's current proposals for the redesign of Picardy Place. This is an outdated scheme which has no place in the future of our great Scottish Capital. We suggest that a radical new approach is required, one firmly based on the principles of good urban design, knitting Picardy Place back into the urban fabric of the city rather than separating it with complex road infrastructure and junctions. There is no compelling urgent need to make a decision now – time is available to put in place the necessary studies and consultation to get a better solution that will work for Edinburgh well into the future.

Cockburn Comments

1. The Cockburn Association believes that Picardy Place is not a traffic mitigation problem to be solved but rather it is an urban design opportunity to be embraced. The current proposals for Picardy place are clearly, first and foremost, designed to manage current vehicular traffic flows. They are most definitely not, but we firmly believe that they should be, the result of an inter-disciplinary process aimed at shaping the urban design of Picardy Place (and its environs) which fully considers the design of existing or potential buildings, groups of buildings, urban spaces and urban landscapes, the requirements of residents and the establishment of frameworks and processes that will facilitate successful development and sustainable ongoing management of the whole area.
2. Picardy Place does not exist in isolation. The St James Quarter development is underway, a major concert hub is proposed behind Dundas House and ambitious new plans are emerging for the re-imagining of George Street and the First New Town. We also understand the Council is to engage in an exercise to establish the future priorities for the future of the city centre. This context is relevant for the

future of Picardy Place both in the sense of its relation to adjacent areas of the city centre and in its 'gateway' role. For this reason, the Cockburn believes that 'do nothing' is an option until there is clarity about the emerging priorities and future development objectives of the city centre as a whole. The retention of the current roundabout is acceptable in the current situation,

3. We also seriously question whether the current design, which does not seek to pro-actively reduce vehicular transport and increase public transport and active travel modes, is in any way acceptable in view of existing Scottish and city transport policies. We do, however, acknowledge the necessity of facilitating the potential future extension of Edinburgh's tram network and believe that Picardy Place could be a significant public transport hub if the correct urban design plan were put in place. However, there is no compelling reason why the decision to relocate a tram hub is Picardy place cannot be reassessed when alternative option in York Place or further down Leith Walk may be viable, and more attractive, alternatives. Similarly, it seems very clear that only vehicular traffic flows have been assess as part of this exercise. An analysis of how pedestrians use this area and how they could use the area if changes are made to the basic assumption behind the design is essential. We point to the Public Life Street Assessment exercises carried out by Here and Now CIC for the City of Edinburgh Council. These are series of studies investigating the public life of Edinburgh's town centres reveal how each currently functions in terms of pedestrian/cyclist movement and as a place. No similar study has been carried out in and around Picardy Place. More generally, although the city has experienced an ever-expanding range of attractively presented and publicly lauded visions, strategies, policies and action plans all aimed at facilitating a more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable city. It is not clear if the drafting up of the current proposals has taken cognisance of and been integrated into any of this now long-established sustainability agenda.
4. The Council states that the proposed design creates more useable space in the form of the island site, and allows for better pedestrian and cyclist movement from one side of Picardy Place to the other. We do not accept this.

In 2009, Council prepared the "Picardy Place Design Principles". The purpose in setting these principles out was to...

".....seek to ensure this potential is realised by promoting development that fundamentally changes the character of this important gateway to the city centre from a roundabout prioritising traffic movement to a high quality public place designed around the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. "

Picardy Place Design Principles Para 5.3

No clear option for the future of this site are in place and pedestrian and cyclist desire lines are not fully accommodated. Rather, we believe that the Picardy Place 'island' presents real challenges in terms of establishing an attractive and meaningful urban space in any scheme which is based on the current proposals. These challenges can only be resolved by means of a comprehensive and

inclusive urban design process. In effect, the redesign of Picardy Place must start from a decision on how the 'island' site is to function and therefore how adjacent areas are to be integrated into a coherent civic design. . Decisions on the nature of required infrastructure such as the junction layout should then follow.

5. The Council's consultation makes the bold claim that the current proposals for Picardy Place reinstate the historic context of this part of the City. We do not accept that this is the case. Picardy Place, as we know it, is of relatively recent origin. This fact is acknowledged in the Picardy Place Design Principles but not, in any way, by the current design proposals. We believe that a case can be made reparative development, with an option being the reinstatement or reconfiguration of buildings removed from the site in the 60s.. By this we mean a bold and ambitious reconceptualisation of Picardy Place which reflects the original urban character of this part of the city. At the same time, it must act as an effective and appealing 'gateway' to one of the most striking city centres in Europe. To achieve this, it will be necessary to perceive Picardy Place as something conceptually larger than itself — encompassing the whole city centre. This is something the current proposals so clearly fail to do.
6. Cockburn Association is also concerned the current proposals could lead to significant dis-benefits for residents in the vicinity of Picardy Place and across the New Town through the displacement of vehicular journeys through surrounding areas. These potential dis-benefits can be predicted and could be managed. However, we have seen no detailed impact studies identifying potential problems and appropriate mitigation interventions. We must re-iterate our point that this can only be done by means of an urban design solution and not through a traffic driven 'quick fix'. We therefore advocate, amongst other studies, a comprehensive Urban Design Framework which joins together initiatives such as Picardy Place, George Street and the First New Town.
7. The present proposals do not present a satisfactory solution for siting and setting of Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's three-piece sculptures, created with a siting and orientation in mind which respects their artistic and creative value. Similarly, the magnificent statue of Sherlock Holmes, which has been a much-loved figure on Picardy Place since 1991, was commissioned to mark the life and activities Arthur Conan Doyle and needs to be sited with careful consideration and not as an afterthought.
8. Finally, we are concerned about the perfunctory nature of the consultation process carried out on the current proposals. Only limited and not fully worked-up details of the current proposals have been made available and wider social, environmental and economic studies relevant to the current proposals have either not be commissioned or have not been made publicly available. This has given residents, the city-wide community and stakeholders only limited opportunities to provide comprehensive views and comments and the consultation process has been consistently undermined by Council assertions that the current plans cannot be altered in any meaningful way. This is simply unacceptable and cannot be said to conform with any best practice standard for public consultation and engagement. The very recent relocation of the Paolozzi sculptures to Hillside

Crescent Gardens prompts both the outcome of the current public consultation of the Picardy Place proposals and consideration of the current or amended designs by Elected Members.