

**PE1595/RRR**

### **Sustrans submission of 17 March 2017**

Following the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017 you wrote to Sustrans Scotland requesting a clarification on our position on the use of controlled crossings in shared space schemes. We hope that the Committee would consider our initial response of 15th February 2016 ([which is enclosed as Appendix A](#)) along with this response.

Sustrans Scotland's position is that a street design which retains standard traffic features such as controlled crossings reduces the impact, effect and purpose of shared space streets as identified in the Scottish Governments 'Designing Streets' policy. Such a design permits and encourages traffic to continue to be the dominant user in a street, and negates the benefits for placemaking and people walking or cycling.

The Petition is aimed at considering the Scottish Government's policy on shared space streets and the built environment. As you will be aware in January 2016 the Petition was created in response to a local high-street regeneration project in Kirkintilloch: the 'Cowgate', led by East Dunbartonshire Council.

Whilst the Petition calls for a policy of moratorium toward 'shared space' in Scotland, Committee meetings have focussed heavily on this particular project in Kirkintilloch, questioning the Transport Minister on details of a project led by East Dunbartonshire Council and supported by Sustrans. We feel this did not give those responsible for delivery an opportunity to provide evidence on this project and, as such, we believe that during the session there were highly misleading representations regarding the Cowgate scheme without an opportunity for response from the relevant organisations. The evidence heard was thus an incomplete picture of the scheme.

Please find enclosed a briefing which outlines Sustrans position on the use of controlled crossings in shared space schemes. I have also provided a response to some of the claims made regarding the Kirkintilloch project and discussed at previous Committee meetings.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss either the project or the topic of 'shared space' in more detail.

### **Briefing for members of the Public Petitions Committee**

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#### **REF. PE01595: MORATORIUM ON SHARED SPACE SCHEMES**

#### **Sustrans Scotland's position on role of controlled crossings in a shared space development**

The following points provide an overview of Sustrans Scotland's position on controlled crossings within shared space environments in response to the questions raised by the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 9 February 2017.

Sustrans considers that the principle of recalibrating streets away from accommodating only vehicle movement in favour of quieter, calmer space where the

movement of people comes first is a sound approach to the urban realm. We strongly support the Scottish Government's 'Designing Streets' policy which outlines its approach to place-making and the use of shared space streets.

Shared space is, however, an often misunderstood and widely used term that can mean more than one design approach to the urban realm.

Generally speaking, we see shared space as a design that delivers an urban space that causes the driver to be less dominant in favour of pedestrians, people on bicycles, emphasising quieter, less congested and less polluted space.

A street design which retains standard traffic features such as controlled crossings reduces the impact, effect and purpose of shared space streets as identified in the Scottish Government's 'Designing Streets' policy. Such a design permits and encourages traffic to continue to be the dominant user in a street, and negates the benefits for placemaking and people walking or cycling. For example, if it were on a spectrum of the varying degrees of shared space, a street with controlled crossings would be at the very margins of the shared space concept, much closer to an orthodox street than one truly delivering a public space where the car dominates much less. This is at odds with creating a more pedestrian-friendly street environment and vibrant community space. We have stated this previously and this continues to be our position.

In our view, a moratorium on shared space as a design approach would be a significant step backwards for national planning, transport and architecture policy and practice and a rejection of the values behind the Scottish Government's 'Designing Streets' policy. Importantly this would have a considerable impact on the future of urban society in Scotland and the aim for more sustainable, socially and economically prosperous places.

## **Briefing on Kirkintilloch: the Cowgate town centre regeneration project**

### **I. Overview**

The following points provide an overview of the proposed scheme to improve the Cowgate in Kirkintilloch, delivered by East Dunbartonshire Council with support from Sustrans Scotland. It responds to questions and comments raised during the petitions committee's discussion of petition PE01595 on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

### **II. Background**

Sustrans takes accessibility very seriously and strives to ensure that all projects in the built environment improve accessibility for people with physical and sensory impairments. Through close engagement with local communities and stakeholder groups we make every effort to ensure that their views are heard in the design of schemes. This is our main objective when directly involved in delivery of projects or through the Community Links bidding process when allocating funds.

Sustrans Scotland's Community Links Programme (CLP) provides grant funding to local authorities, statutory bodies and educational institutions for the creation of cycling and walking infrastructure for everyday journeys. It is a competitive design programme, has been running since 2010 and has funded over 500 projects to date. The programme is funded through Transport Scotland's Sustainable Transport Team within the Scottish Government. East Dunbartonshire Council applied for grant funding in 2013/14 with the specific aim of recalibrating street space in Kirkintilloch town centre in favour of active travel and to overcome physical barriers to walking and cycling especially at key junctions.

The Cowgate Street Design Project is a key element of the Kirkintilloch Town Centre Masterplan managed by East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC). The Masterplan outlines a number of measures intended to improve the physical environment and economic performance of the main public and retail areas in Kirkintilloch.

The East Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2 (2011) stated that Kirkintilloch town centre was in need of improvements as it was the authority's poorest performing town centre. This policy stated that public realm improvements were required and consultation commenced in November 2011 on the Kirkintilloch Masterplan. The Cowgate Street Design project was initiated from consultation responses during the preparation of the Masterplan, which informed the Council that people wanted pedestrian priority and not pedestrianisation. Full details of the Masterplan can be found here: <https://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/Masterplan>

Following the adoption of the Masterplan by EDC in 2013 the Cowgate Street Design has gone through further extensive engagement with the community, the initial proposed scheme – which could have been described as a prominent 'shared space' approach throughout the Cowgate section - has been heavily adapted.

The initial designs proposed to have a level street surface and minimal demarcation between footway and highways at key points, slow traffic speed and reduced traffic flow, enabling people to cross more easily and create a sense of place. These objectives are consistent with the Scottish Government's excellent *Designing Streets* policy.

Feedback on the initial design proposals, gathered from public consultation events alongside detailed work with representatives of disability groups, and collected at two specific Design Equality Forums, has been used to extensively modify the original design proposals.

As a result, features to reinforce a clear demarcation between footways and highways and make the street more accessible have been introduced into the current design proposals, as well as new controlled crossings.

### **III. Specific clarifications for the Petitions Committee**

#### **1. Consultation**

***The committee asked for clarification on whether the local authority consulted visually impaired groups and others. Concerns were raised as to what might happen if there was no consultation and a scheme went ahead regardless and whether this would constitute a contravention of their rights.***

Sustrans can confirm that the Cowgate Street Design project has been developed with direct involvement of the community and a range of interest groups from its conception. The consultation programme, carried out by East Dunbartonshire Council, has specifically engaged with groups with physical and sensory impairments to ensure their voices are heard and their requirements incorporated into the designs.

The consultation programme:

- Established a Champions Group forum to promote the Kirkintilloch Town Centre Masterplan and review designs for the Cowgate. This group includes many representatives of community groups including the East Dunbartonshire Access Panel and East Dunbartonshire Equalities Group;
- Held a series of public engagement events, including an information stall at the 2012, 2014 & 2015 Canal festivals; stall at Regents Gardens during the 'Test Town' event in June 2014; a 4-day drop-in event in December 2014 in a pop-up shop in Kirkintilloch Town Centre, and; a month-long trial at the Catherine Street junction in the summer of 2014 managed by EDC in partnership with Sustrans.
- Met four times with the East Dunbartonshire Visually Impaired Persons Forum (EDVIP), with representatives from EDC and Sustrans. This included two meetings during the Catherine Street Trial between the 30<sup>th</sup> of July and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2014. In addition, the representatives from the Council and Sustrans took part in a "blind walk" with Guide Dogs UK during the trial on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August.
- The project team conducted a walking audit of the Cowgate on the 18th November 2014 with the EDVIP group. Through the walking audit the team learned about the issues, hazards and barriers to movement that the groups faced and used the information to feed into the design of the street.

- Held two 'Equalities Design Forum' consultation meetings and one feedback meeting, which reviewed the fine detail of the design, focussing on use of tactile paving, preferred pedestrian crossing types, materials, kerb heights, street furniture and signage, with representatives of:
  - EDVIP,
  - Deaf Blind Scotland,
  - Guide Dogs UK,
  - National Federation of Blind UK,
  - Scottish Disability Equality Forum,
  - Police Scotland,
  - Freewheel North, and
  - The EDC Sensory Impairment Rehabilitation and Equality Officers
- Held further Pop-up shop drop-in sessions on the Cowgate in November 2015 and October/November 2016.
- Mailed information to all residents and businesses to promote the town centre and raise awareness of the Cowgate Street Design Works.
- Advertised the scheme in the Kirkintilloch Herald, The Evening Times and the Sunday Herald.

East Dunbartonshire Council are committed to coordinate re-training with groups, including Guide Dogs UK and Deaf Blind Scotland, so that they are supported to adjust to the new environment.

As a result of this major programme of consultation, further design revisions were incorporated, specifically to accommodate those with mobility and/or visual impairment. The design was modified to include the following:

- Reduced crossing distances through the narrowing of roads at the junction and along the street;
- Greater accessibility through pavement widening and rationalisation of street clutter, to remove hazards;
- Improved legibility for people with visual impairments through the provision of tactile and visually contrasting paving materials to mark crossing points and demarcate the footway from the highway;
- Creation of a clear circulation space to ensure that street furniture, which can be viewed as a barrier to movement, is located in a space which does not impede pedestrian movement;
- Retention of kerbs at the junction and other raised areas to help in the demarcation of space, and;

- Two signal controlled Puffin crossings at the Catherine Street junction, following further representations to Elected Members ahead of the Council in June 2015 by the East Dunbartonshire Visually Impaired People's Forum;

Since the initial proposals, the designs have been modified significantly to accommodate the needs of visually impaired and mobility impaired people. Many of the changes have come about as a direct consequence of engagement with EDVIP and other local groups. Indeed an independent quality audit by Living Streets stated that: *"Based on this assessment, the overall impact of the balanced street approach for the Cowgate is likely to be positive and it would be hoped that it would feature as a case study in future versions of the Town Centre Toolkit and Designing Streets"*.

## 2. Funding criteria -

***The question was raised as to whether the level of weighting given to applications for Sustrans funding contributed to greater focus on the needs of cyclists rather than the needs of other users.***

Sustrans can confirm that any Community Links bid that it supports must comply with Scottish Government's national policy and design guidance relating to the built environment, including the UK Government's Equalities Act 2010. Sustrans believes that, while differing in need, an inclusive environment for disabled people is also safer and more accessible for people on foot or on cycles and that, when funding is made available for a new scheme, every opportunity should be taken to create an inclusive built environment according to current best practice.

Sustrans has funded the Kirkintilloch project through its Community Links Programme which seeks to deliver objectives outlined in Transport Scotland's 'Cycling Action Plan for Scotland 2013' (CAPS).

Bids are judged against the objectives of the Community Links programme, which are to:

- Create infrastructure that encourages people to cycle, walk or use another active travel mode as their preferred mode of travel for everyday journeys
- Meet the needs of communities – provide communities with the opportunity to shape their local environment and link the places people live in with the places they want to get to
- Encourage innovation – support partner organisations in raising the standard of infrastructure for walking and cycling in Scotland
- Encourage place-making which facilitates greater use of public space and higher levels of active travel
- Create an enabling environment for active travel

### **3. Tackling road danger**

***The Committee has raised questions about road danger in the context of the new Cowgate development and the “alarming” speeds of cars and lorries going through it.***

The Cowgate project has been developed to make it safer, easier and more attractive for people walking and cycling - improving the quality of place.

The Catherine Street junction re-design in question proposes to remove an existing signalised traffic junction to re-balance the street environment away from through-traffic. To achieve this, the street and junction have been designed to encourage traffic speeds of 20 miles per hour or less, with road narrowing, traffic calming and visual features that require drivers to slow down. Initial monitoring of traffic speeds on approaches to junction show that the speeds have dramatically reduced as a result of the new layout and features.

The final designs for the project were subject to an independent Stage 2 Road Safety Audit conducted in line with national guidance by a specialist transport consultancy. Further to this the Catherine Street junction was subject of an interim independent Stage 3 Safety Audit. Neither Road Safety Audit highlighted any material issues.

As noted above, an independent quality audit by the charity Living Streets was also conducted which gave a favourable conclusion. Please note that upon project completion an independent stage 4 Road Safety Audit will be commissioned to assess the safety of the newly constructed layout in operation, as will a follow up appraisal by Living Streets.

### **4. Compliance with Equalities Act 2010**

***The question of whether the Equalities Act 2010 was raised.***

We are aware that East Dunbartonshire Council has undertaken an extensive Equality Impact Assessment of the project, overseen by the Council's Equality Officer. This process included consultation with potentially affected groups, as defined by the act, and as outlined under section 1.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Sustrans supports East Dunbartonshire Council's aspirations to transform the Cowgate into an attractive, economically and socially vibrant space. We believe strongly that the built environment has to be inclusive and take into account the needs of all users of the space – shoppers, families on foot, children, elderly and disabled users, cyclists, bus passengers, and drivers.

We anticipate that detailed pre and post works monitoring being conducted as part of the scheme will show a trend towards a more people friendly space with reduced vehicle speeds and volumes and an improved environment for people on foot and those travelling by bicycle.

Through extensive public consultation the scheme has been radically changed to move it far away from the original design proposals which advocated for level surfaces and minimal demarcation.

We believe it is misleading to cite this project as a reason to call for a moratorium on shared space. Shared space should be correctly understood as an approach to design that advocates for a context-led approach that places the needs of people, active travel and place over motorised vehicles.

At this time we do not believe that a moratorium is the best way to proceed. Given that the Cowgate, Kirkintilloch is not a fully shared space scheme in its purist form, for the reasons outlined in point 4 above, it cannot be used to critique the concept. Furthermore, it must be given time to be used by the people of Kirkintilloch and its use closely monitored.