



Living Streets Edinburgh objection to planning reference 15/04445/FUL- Mixed use development comprising hotel, bar, restaurant, cafe, retail and commercial uses and alterations to India Buildings, 11-15 Victoria Street and Cowgatehead Church. | 1 -15 Victoria Street 18-20 Cowgate Edinburgh EH1 2EX

Living Streets Edinburgh has a number of concerns about this application, which lead us to object to it. Our reading of the application leads us to believe that the developer has not fully considered the implications of their proposal for pedestrians, and where they have considered them, they have ignored key issues.

Our main objection relates to the issue of loading/unloading in the Cowgate and Victoria Street, but we highlight below further concerns about access to bus stops, and general pedestrian accessibility.

Loading & Unloading

The planning application proposes that coaches and goods vehicles will use the Cowgate for loading/unloading of goods and people. They've included a very narrow loading bay to facilitate this. However, the Cowgate is simply not wide enough at this point to accommodate vehicle loading.

The proposed loading bay will take away valuable pavement space. The pavements in this area are already very narrow – and are on a busy road. They're currently 1.8m (at the back of this site), and yet the developers want to NARROW them further, which seems likely to take them to the very minimum advised in the council's own street guidance, given that the Cowgate is demarcated as a secondary retail/high st.



At present, deliveries to the site use the lane at the back of the Central Library up to the back of 'Espionage'. They do not use the street as in the current proposal. The Cowgate is one of the only east / west roads left in the city center open to general traffic. Any blockage would have major knock on effects through the Cowgate and Grassmarket. Any vehicle loading or unloading would cause severe congestion within minutes. The proposed narrow loading bay would not facilitate 2 way traffic.

As can be seen elsewhere in the Cowgate, delivery vehicles frequently park on the pavement, forcing pavement users into the road. The damage caused by delivery vehicles can be seen throughout the Cowgate. It would be extremely deleterious to the pedestrian experience of Edinburgh, as well as costly to the council, if this practice were to be expanded any further.



For example, at the back of the recently opened Soco development an attempt was made by developers to build a loading bay on the pavement. This has not worked as vehicles often take up the entire loading bay AND pavement, again blocking the pavement for legitimate users.



Night-time closures

We also note that the site is within the night time road closures of Cowgate. There is no mention of this in the planning application. If a delivery vehicle or bus requires access 10pm till 6 am where do they park? If a vehicle does go through the no entry signs, parks on the Cowgate, how would it leave the site? Reverse out or drive through the closed road? Any of these options would again be disadvantageous to vulnerable road users such as pedestrians.

Narrow pavements and expanded footfall

Pavement narrows to just 85cm meters from the proposed development

This proposal will inevitably increase the number of pavement users on the Cowgate. No mention of this has been made in the application. To the east of this development the pavement narrows to just 85cm under George the 4th Bridge on both sides of the road. To the west pedestrians have to negotiate the very wide junction at the bottom of Victoria street.



With regards to Victoria Street the road narrows at the front of the development / behind the G&V Hotel. As can be seen in some of the photos in the application the pavements in this area have been badly damaged by delivery vehicles parking on them.



Victoria st junction

Any hotel guest trying to travel north will have to cross the 2 lanes of traffic at the top of Victoria Street. During the rush hour it can be difficult to cross this junction on foot. The increased number of vehicle movements on this street as a result of this development will only make the issue worse.



We are also concerned about the knock-on effects on Victoria St, which is likely to be used by coach or other delivery vehicles, especially those relying on SatNav. The street runs the risk of being overwhelmed if large vehicles attempt to negotiate this narrow street and become blocked.

Bus facilities- George IV bridge

The planning application makes note of the bus facilities nearby for use by its customers. It does not mention that you have to cross 4 lanes of heavy traffic on George IV bridge to get to them.



Our advice would be that if the development is approved, it should be on the condition that

- An off-street loading / unloading / drop off point should be created off the Cowgate. The site is big enough for this. There's an example of an off road delivery bay at the Smart City Hostel further along the Cowgate.
- The pavements should be widened along this part of the site to at least the far side of the George the 4th Bridge.
- A pelican crossing should be installed on George the 4th Bridge at the top of Victoria St to allow people to cross the road without having to walk up to the junction with the Royal Mile to be able to cross the road safely.
- All pavements surrounding the site should be protected by bollards to prevent vehicles parking on the pavement. The upkeep and maintenance of these bollards and the paving stones should be met by the development.
- During construction pedestrian traffic should be maintained on both sides of the road.
- The bottom of Victoria Street at the junction with the Cowgate should be narrowed to allow pedestrians to cross the junction safely.
- Along Victoria Street and the Cowgate more crossing points should be provided to allow pedestrians safer access to the development.

About Living Streets

Living Streets works to bring our streets to life, with more walking in people-friendly public spaces.

They were formed in 1929, as the Pedestrians Association, and have grown to include a network of 98 branches and affiliated groups, 40 local authority members and a growing number of corporate supporters. As well as working to influence policy on a national and local level, they also carry out a range of practical work to train professionals in good street design, and enable local communities to improve their own neighbourhoods. They also run high profile campaigns such as Walk to School and Walking Works, to encourage people to increase their walking levels and realise their vision of vibrant, living streets across the UK.

Living Streets work in Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government.

Living Streets Edinburgh is a volunteer-run local group, engaging with issues specific to Edinburgh.

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