



**LIVING**



**STREETS**



EDINBURGH



# CUT THE CLUTTER:

**CLEARING EDINBURGH'S PAVEMENTS FOR PEDESTRIANS**



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Published by Living Streets Edinburgh Group, 2020  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Pavement clutter makes ‘everyday walking’ and ‘wheeling’ more difficult and, for some people, more dangerous. Our report seeks to raise awareness of the problem and to find solutions in Edinburgh, with wider lessons across the country.**

Living Streets Edinburgh undertook their ‘Cut the Pavement Clutter’ project in 2019-2020, supported by Paths for All, Living Streets UK and the City of Edinburgh Council.

In our assessment of 290 different clutter locations across Edinburgh, we defined pavement clutter as anything which gets in the way of walking. There is always a reason for the presence of any item of pavement clutter – but often not a good reason. Some ‘clutter’ is essential (eg bus stops/shelters and waste bins) but much is not – and that which is essential is often inappropriately sited, or could be provided in a way that doesn’t obstruct people walking. It can be fixed objects such as guard rails, large commercial / communal waste / recycling bins, signage poles and signs, or temporary obstructions like overhanging hedges or tree branches, and road works and associated signs / debris.

Why does it matter? Pavements in Edinburgh and many other cities, towns and villages are too narrow. There’s often not enough space for people to walk and enjoy the local environment. For blind people, clutter can be a serious hazard. For parents with children and especially disabled people, it can block a pavement completely.

**We found that just four types of clutter were the most common:**

1. **signage / poles**
2. **vegetation**
3. **bins**
4. **guard rails.**

Through this project Living Streets Edinburgh has developed a better understanding of how clutter comes about and how difficult it can be for the Council’s Roads staff to manage the problems. In terms of **conclusions**, we have identified two key themes which underlie the ongoing problems with pavement clutter:

**Resources:** Roads staff face multiple requests for items to be placed on the street from many different sources (both within the Council and from external bodies). Resource constraints (both in terms of staffing and capital) limit the extent to which clutter (and the scope for removing it) is assessed.

**Cultural / corporate / cross-departmental problems:** Council Roads staff are overwhelmed.

As a result they may avoid time-intensive activities which involve engagement with residents. There is scope for a more engaged culture and operational style, less focused on technical interventions and more on fostering community understanding of, and support for, clearer pavements.

While the new Street Enforcement Service goes some way towards a more holistic approach to clutter, other aspects of the problem are the responsibility of up to seven other Council departments / sections.

In terms of **recommendations**, our key suggestions include:

### The Council's corporate culture and direction:

- > At the top political and Chief Officer levels, inspired (and inspiring) leadership is needed to demonstrate and deliver corporate priority for holistic street management – creating safe, civilised and uncluttered space for pedestrians.
- > High-level intervention is required to devote the necessary staffing and resources for this transformation – including transport staff dedicated to walking, as the latter's needs are largely very different from cycling, which currently dominates the 'Active Travel' section of the Council.

### Targeted short-term actions on specific pavement clutter problems:

Some pavement clutter problems will take longer than others to resolve, but we suggest a number of potential 'quick wins', including:

- > Remove unnecessary signage poles and signs.
- > Ask residents – as part of a community-focused project, with appropriate funding – to cut back hedges and branches which obstruct walking (this needs to be done in winter, before the growing and nesting season).
- > Manage roadworks properly – implementing the 'Red Book' requirement that pavements be kept free of obstructions. The regulator (the Scottish Road Works Commissioner) has a role here in improving standards.

### Wider actions:

National action and support can play an important part in reinforcing change here in Edinburgh and across Scotland. This should include a review by professional institutes and associations of their professional training to encourage a culture among roads engineers which values decluttering and embraces, for example, the legislation which encourages and allows for a reduction in unnecessary signage.

 In addition to this report, we have prepared a short video to communicate the findings of our project more widely to bodies such as these. See: [https://youtu.be/\\_owjs7clKfk](https://youtu.be/_owjs7clKfk)

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Pavement clutter makes 'everyday walking' more difficult and, for some people, more dangerous. Our report seeks to raise awareness of the problem and to find solutions in Edinburgh, with wider lessons across the country.**

Living Streets Edinburgh Group (LSEG) – which is the local voluntary arm of the national charity campaigning for better conditions for everyday walking – carried out its 'Tackling Street Clutter through Locality Working' project in the summer of 2019. We are grateful to Paths for All<sup>1</sup> for supporting the project through its 'Smarter Choices, Smarter Places' Open Fund.

Living Streets UK and the City of Edinburgh Council also supported this initiative and the Council allocated matched funding from existing maintenance budgets towards removing identified clutter across the city. The project will contribute to the City of Edinburgh Council's commitment in its business plan to reduce street clutter (Commitment No. 27).<sup>2</sup>

The project also complements the recent initiative to ban advertising boards ('A-boards') in the city. In 2019, the Council confirmed a permanent ban on A-boards and similar structures, introduced on a temporary basis the year before. This followed a four year campaign led by LSEG and supported by organisations including Edinburgh Access Panel (representing disabled people), Old Town Community Council, Tollcross Community Council, and the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The A-board ban was an important step forward in developing a strategy to tackle all kinds of pavement clutter, and the Council (led by the Planning Department) deserves great credit for being the first Scottish city to introduce a comprehensive ban.

### The wider Edinburgh context:

With a population approaching 540,000, Edinburgh – particularly in the centre and inner suburbs, and around key 'town centres' across the city – is a relatively compact place, inherently suited to walking.



Official statistics show that more people in Edinburgh walk to work (22%) than in any other Scottish Local Authority area. For all trips, walking was the main mode of travel for 34% of Edinburgh residents - more than any other mode, including driving (which was 30%). In a single week 84% of Edinburgh residents walked as a means of travel (ie not just for leisure), and in a single month 80% of Edinburgh residents used the bus – with every bus passenger reaching and leaving the bus on a pavement.

But while Edinburgh has many unique aspects, it shares with cities, towns and villages throughout Scotland the growing problem of pavement clutter – and we all have lessons to learn.

## PROJECT AIMS:

Our project had two key aims:

**First**, to identify at least 100 obstructions on city pavements which inhibit walking – aiming to have at least some of these removed as a result of our report.

**Second** – and just as important – to develop our understanding of the problems that pavement clutter cause and to share perspectives on managing clutter between ourselves (LSEG members and supporters), community representatives and Council staff working at ‘the coal face’ of managing local roads. This meant liaising closely with the four ‘Locality’ Roads Managers and their staff who manage day-to-day roads and environmental functions across the city.

### The key audiences for this report are:

- > staff in the Council, from Roads Managers to Network Inspectors – and Councillors
- > community organisations such as Community Councils – and not just in Edinburgh, as the findings are likely to be relevant across Scotland
- > disability groups (visual impairment in particular) such as the Edinburgh Access Panel and the RNIB
- > the wider public, who will benefit directly from less cluttered pavements
- > other Local Authorities across Scotland
- > the Scottish Government, since on some issues (eg signage regulations) government clarification would be helpful to the City of Edinburgh Council and other Local Authorities
- > professional associations, researchers, policy makers and designers, both locally and nationally

Finalisation of this report has been delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and in Section 6 we consider the possible implications.

# 2. WHAT IS PAVEMENT CLUTTER, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

We defined pavement clutter as anything which gets in the way of walking – it is everywhere. There is always a reason for the presence of any item of pavement clutter – but often not a good reason. Some ‘clutter’ is essential (eg bus stops/shelters and waste bins) but much is not – and that which is essential is often inappropriately sited, or could be provided in a way that doesn’t obstruct people walking. It can be *fixed objects* such as:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| > bus stops and shelters                             | <b>...or temporary obstructions like:</b>  |
| > crash barriers                                     | > A-boards   |
| > cycle racks  | > advertising signs and panels around lighting columns                           |
| > guard rails  | > overhanging hedges or tree branches  |
| > lamp posts   | > road works and associated signs / debris                                       |
| > large commercial / communal waste / recycling bins | > shop merchandise displays (not permitted, but all too often seen on pavements) |
| > litter bins and grit bins                          | > tables & chairs outside cafes (extending beyond official permit areas).        |
| > parking ticket machines                            |  |
| > phone kiosks                                       |  |
| > Royal Mail holding boxes and postboxes             |  |
| > signage poles and signs                            |  |
| > traffic signal poles and control boxes             |  |
| > utility boxes.                                     |  |

We didn’t focus on pavement parking, because in many (but far from all) cases, it is very time-limited. Domestic wheelie bins were also excluded for similar reasons. There is no question however that both are serious problems, and pavement parking requires robust implementation of the controls agreed in the 2019 Transport Act.



# Why does it matter?

Pavements in Edinburgh and many other cities, towns and villages are too narrow. There’s often not enough space for people to walk and enjoy the local environment. For blind people, clutter can be a serious hazard. For parents with children and especially disabled people, it can block a pavement completely.

Fixed clutter is a design issue for the Council, whereas temporary obstructions are a problem of Council street management – both are barriers to safe, convenient and comfortable walking. But they are often the responsibility of different departments / sections / agencies. *Good streets demand that we get both design and management right.*

## The wider policy picture:

In 2015, the Council adopted an excellent *Street Design Guidance* document<sup>3</sup> which has as a core principle the creation of safe, accessible and pleasant walking environments through all Council interventions – from the planning and design of new streets to routine road maintenance. The document also provides valuable guidance on ‘desirable’ and ‘absolute minimum’ recommended pavement widths. These range from an absolute minimum of 2 metres wide on the quietest, low-density residential streets, to – on strategic retail / high streets – an absolute minimum of 2.5m (only allowed in short sections) and a desirable minimum of 4m or wider. The Council’s web site map allows you to identify which streets fall into each category.<sup>4</sup>

Pedestrians throughout the city have to negotiate very many pavements which fail to meet these admirable standards, but clearly a wholesale transformation of pavement widths cannot be achieved overnight. However, tackling pavement clutter can ease the problem – and can be done quickly. The Street Design Guidance reinforces decluttering initiatives, *since for every category of street in Edinburgh it lays down an absolute minimum ‘Clear Walking Zone’ of 1.5m width*, ‘only allowed in short sections’. Perhaps the biggest single barrier to the achievement of this admirable aim is the proliferation of pavement clutter.

The GB-wide relaxation of statutory signage requirements in the ‘Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016’<sup>5</sup> (TSRGD) issued by the Department for Transport mean that in principle much less signage is now required on the streets. Excess provision of various traffic signs has been recognised at national level as a significant problem that has created unnecessary clutter, and the TSRGD were revised with the specific intention of reducing this clutter. While the revisions do allow for less signage to be used, and new traffic management schemes are more likely to be designed accordingly, the advice given is often left open to interpretation at local level. When it comes to reviewing and reducing the signage associated with existing schemes at local level, it is unsurprising that conservative interpretations are being made, even where there is commitment to undertake any such reviews.

Road works and associated debris are a recurring feature of pavement clutter in Edinburgh. The ‘Safety at Street Works and Road Works: a code of practice’ – the so-called ‘Red Book’, see extract below – provides well-established statutory guidance on how roadworks must be designed and managed, with much emphasis on ensuring that pedestrians’ needs are considered, such as making sure that roadworks signs do not obstruct the pavement, that barriers leave enough space for a wheelchair user to pass and that sites are well lit.<sup>6</sup> However, as with many aspects of the ‘public realm’, enforcement is inconsistent, often leaving pedestrians to make their way through an obstacle course.

Part 2: Operations 28

**Footway and footpath works – look after pedestrians**

Where footways and pedestrian areas are affected by street works and road works, it is your responsibility to make sure that pedestrians passing the works are safe. This means protecting them from both the works and passing traffic.

You **must** take into account the needs of children, older people and disabled people, having particular regard for visually impaired people. In order to do this you must provide a suitable barrier system (see page 97) that safely separates pedestrians from hazards and provides a safe route suitable for people using wheelchairs, mobility scooters, prams or pushchairs. Always be on the lookout for pedestrians who seem confused or who are having difficulty negotiating a temporary route, and be prepared to offer assistance.

**Safe routes for pedestrians**

If your work is going to obstruct a footway or part of a footway, you must provide a safe route for pedestrians that should include access to adjacent buildings, properties and public areas where necessary. This route must consider the needs of those with small children, pushchairs and those with reduced mobility, including visually impaired people and people using wheelchairs or mobility scooters.

National transport and planning policies also reinforce the prioritisation of pedestrian needs on the street, with walking placed at the top of the hierarchy of transport modes in the *National Transport Strategy 27* and in *Scottish Planning Policy*<sup>8</sup>. But we have found little or no evidence of this fundamental point – and hence the programmes and projects locally which should deliver these national policy priorities – in any recent City of Edinburgh Council documents setting out intended transport or planning strategies.

A related point is that in Living Streets Edinburgh’s experience in dealings with the Council’s ‘Active Travel’ section is that staff time and thinking is overwhelmingly dominated by cycling. At the time of writing *not one officer was wholly dedicated to walking*, yet the latter’s needs are largely very different from cycling, and walking has a fundamental role to play in a sustainable future for the city.

# 3. WHAT WE DID

The roots of this project lie in Living Streets Edinburgh's work over recent years to improve local streets, in particular our A-boards campaign. With the A-board ban now firmly established, and with significant support for reducing clutter among councillors and community groups, there was an opportunity to move on to tackle other types of obstruction that litter many city streets, hindering safe and convenient pedestrian movement. We therefore secured support from some key partners (especially the Access Panel and the Council) for an application to Paths for All's 'Smarter Choices, Smarter Places' Open Fund for a small grant which enabled the project to be delivered.

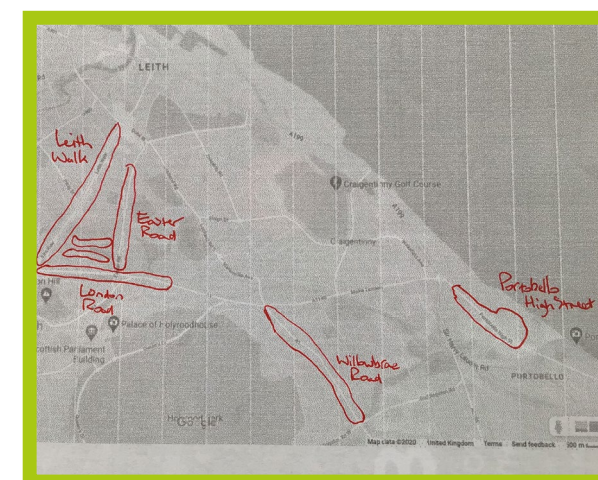
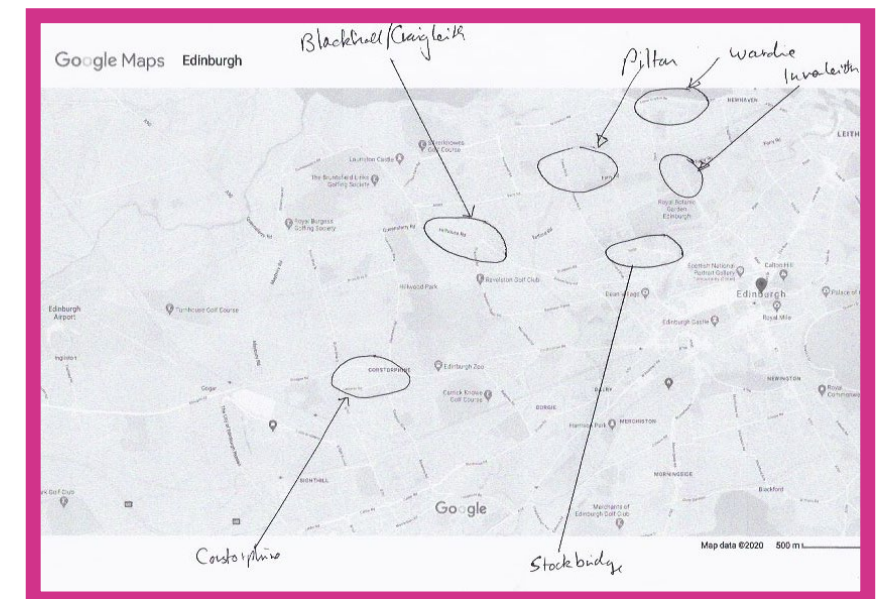
Four members of Living Streets Edinburgh led the project, working in the city's four 'Localities' (North West, North East, South East and South West) - which have now been centralised into city-wide services. We emailed all community councils in the city that we could find and also the Edinburgh Access Panel, inviting suggestions for key problem areas to be examined.

Based on this feedback and personal knowledge, we then walked selected city streets, recording and photographing objects which we felt inhibited walking and should be removed. We appreciate the participation of members of the Access Panel, local campaigners, community councillors, City of Edinburgh Councillors and staff who joined us on several of these walks.

The project aimed to take in different parts of the city, focusing as much on residential districts as on 'town centres' or central Edinburgh. The main areas assessed are set out below. We appreciate that this inevitably misses out many parts of the city where – without doubt – pavement clutter is just as much of a problem. And even in the areas assessed only a sample of streets and street sections could be selected. But these samples from all four Localities have helped us to understand the wider problem.

North East	North West	South East	South West
Easter Road	Blackhall/Craigleith	Bruntsfield	Colinton
Leith Walk	Broomhouse	Tollcross	Dalry
London Road	Corstorphine	Hanover St	Gorgie
Portobello	Drumrae	Morrison St	Oxgangs
Willowbrae	Ferry Road	South Bridge	Slateford
	Pilton	Walter Scott Avenue	Dundee St

The Living Streets Edinburgh team selected a variety of streets throughout the city and went out on foot to assess the extent and type of clutter problems on the ground.





# 4. WHAT WE FOUND

In all, we identified 290 items of clutter which we felt should be tackled - far more than the original target of 100! Also some of these items were actually composite clusters of different types of clutter. We took a broad view of what might be considered 'clutter', which to some extent is subjective, but aimed to focus largely on items which are fixed, or at least in place for a considerable time. So this included the likes of signage poles, guard rails, large communal / trade waste bins, overhanging hedges and other vegetation, utility boxes, phone kiosks and roadworks signs.

We generally excluded items like the occasional stray 'A-board' (contravening the city-wide ban), domestic wheelie bins and pavement parking, despite encountering the latter two on many streets (serious pavement parking problems were encountered in Drumbrae, Granton and Portobello, for example).

However, we did record examples of road works and associated signs / debris: temporary obstructions which are in place for days (or weeks) and are widespread across the city, and often make life difficult for pedestrians.

The most common types of clutter identified in each of the Localities are listed below. This should not necessarily be interpreted as representative of the entire Locality – for example, the selection of residential as opposed to shopping streets within small sample areas boosts the prominence of overhanging hedges / vegetation – but it does give some indication of the biggest problems.

	North East	North West	South East	South West
1	Signage / poles	Signage / poles	Vegetation	Signage / poles
2	Vegetation	Guard rails	Signage /poles	Guard rails
3	Bins	Vegetation	Bins	Bins

An assessment of the ease / difficulty with which the Council can arrange for removal of such types of clutter (as advised by the South East Locality) is summarised in Section 5. Some particularly bad examples of clutter in each Locality are illustrated in the selection of photos below.

It can be seen that just four types of clutter were the most common:

- > signage / poles
- > vegetation
- > bins
- > guard rails.

## North East Locality



These bins seem to be scattered randomly – and why are they obstructing the pavement rather than being placed in the empty carriageway space?



Does this clunky 'temporary' signage pole serve any useful purpose? If it does, couldn't the sign be attached to the nearby lighting column?





## North West Locality



Is the pole necessary, and is the utility box still operational?



In theory, pedestrians are at the top of the Scottish Government's 'Sustainable Movement Hierarchy', but too often, in practice, they are at the bottom. This signage placement completely ignores the official guidance in 'the Red Book'



The usable space of an already narrow pavement is significantly reduced by a guard rail, and further constrained by thoughtlessly-left cones.



Why is this telephone box sited on such a narrow pavement?

## South East Locality



There is no excuse for allowing hedges and other vegetation to block pavements – it is the householder's responsibility.



According to the Council's own Street Design Guidance, signs on double poles should be avoided – but they are everywhere!



The combination of a guard rail and a thoughtlessly-placed communal bin means pedestrians don't even have the benefit of the Council's 'absolute minimum' Clear Walking Zone of 1.5 metres (as set out in its Street Design Guidance).



Too many of our pavements are cluttered with redundant Royal Mail 'holding boxes'.



## South West Locality



Both sides of this street suffer from over-provision of signs and signposts, obstructing pedestrian passage – and a communal waste bin has been thoughtlessly placed close to the 20 mph pole sitting in the centre of the pavement. And the duplication of the one-way and Control Zone signs is not required or necessary on such a narrow street.



Bins here are the centrepiece of a shambles of neglect. In fairness to the Council, after we reported these problems the Locality team did remove the derelict waste bin and improved the positioning of the others – but the redundant bin clamp remained as a trip hazard and the bins were still on the pavement, without a designated placement zone.



*before . . .*



*. . . and after*

Cutting back vegetation makes a big difference, but useable pavement width is still limited by the guard rail.

# CLUTTER ATTRACTS CLUTTER . . .

**Our survey work demonstrated that clustering of clutter is a big problem – clutter attracts more clutter.**





# 5. HOW CAN THE COUNCIL (AND OTHERS) TACKLE THE MAIN TYPES OF CLUTTER?

At the time of writing, we were awaiting responses from the Council on most of the individual items which we identified. However, some items have been tackled as ‘quick wins’ (especially removal of overhanging vegetation). In a number of other cases, Council staff judge that items which we identified as ‘clutter’ should be retained for cost / complexity reasons. Often, Locality staff have to consult further with colleagues over whether items which we have identified can be removed. While we received excellent support from Locality offices in the early stages of the project, we were only provided with feedback from two of the four Localities on the specific problems which we identified.

However, advice from the South East Locality (in quote marks below) provided a useful insight into the ease / difficulty with which the Council can arrange for removal of the four most common types of clutter identified above (*and we have added our own comments in italics*):

Contact details for the relevant Council departments / sections are shown at the foot of each section below.

## Signage / poles

‘These tend to be set back a minimum of 300mm to 500mm from the kerb edge to ensure they are not damaged by passing vehicles. Some of the locations highlighted would need a full junction or street re-design to improve this – and that is the Council’s long-term goal. Some parking signs could be placed on buildings but this would require permission from the building owner, which would not necessarily be forthcoming.’

*Note that this refers to poles with a continuing function, as opposed to those which are redundant, or are duplicated – the process for removing / rationalising these should normally be easier.*

*It should also be noted that relaxation of statutory requirements in the ‘Traffic Signs*

Regulations and General Directions 2016’<sup>9</sup> (TSRGD) issued by the Department for Transport mean that in principle much less signage is now required on the streets. However, the ‘cultural’ change required to consistently implement such new approaches to the street environment – and to treat streets as welcoming ‘places’<sup>10</sup> which should not be needlessly cluttered – has evidently not yet become rooted within the Council. This is highly unlikely to be an ‘Edinburgh only’ issue, and should be of concern to professional bodies nationally, such as the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transport (CIHT) and the Institute of Highway Engineers (IHE), as well as Scottish Government agencies such as Transport Scotland.

*It is clear from our survey results that there*

*is a great amount of excess signage in Edinburgh, in particular along the main road corridors where more complex traffic and parking management issues arise. Most of the management schemes involved were introduced decades ago, under more rigid signage regulations and without clear pedestrian-friendly design guidance. Many of the signs are duplicated unnecessarily, are often old and faded or even illegible, are sometimes out of position or even missing from their redundant posts. It was obvious that little or no significant routine inspection or maintenance has been undertaken. For consistent progress to be made in this context, an unequivocal policy commitment to minimising signage clutter is seen to be needed, along with detailed guidance as to what this entails for the various types of sign. There also needs to be a commitment to a thorough review process extending across the city, eg on a corridor by corridor basis.*

**Contact:** [StreetLighting@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:StreetLighting@edinburgh.gov.uk) or [Parking@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Parking@edinburgh.gov.uk) (time plates on poles) or [TrafficSigns@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:TrafficSigns@edinburgh.gov.uk) (directional or informative signs).

## Vegetation

‘A letter can be sent to an individual owner relatively easily, but organising this on a wider scale (and ensuring that action is taken by the owner) can be resource-intensive, and is not currently a high priority for the Council.’

*A possible complementary action would be to produce a leaflet which encourages home owners to be aware of the problem and to take action themselves. This could be a ‘quick win’, especially if it mobilises residents/communities rather than putting more pressure on Council services.*

**Contact:** [streetenforcement@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:streetenforcement@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Communal waste bins

‘The Council can explore alternative locations, but this can require promotion of a Traffic Order (if they are located next to parking bays or other form of loading or bus lane restrictions), and can take up to 18 months.’

*In many instances no such order would be required – where the bins are on pavement extensions, the main problem is the lack of any properly-defined areas for the placement of bins by binmen.*

*We understand that the Council plans to introduce a design arrangement in which bins will normally be stored in secure areas on the carriageway.*

**Contact:** [Waste@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Waste@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Trade waste bins

‘All business waste should now be stored internally and should only be presented on the street during specified time windows. The Council’s Environmental Wardens and Waste Compliance Team should pick up any problems on their routine inspections, but members of the public can also alert officials.’

*More broadly, the current system of waste management should be reviewed. Many continental cities manage waste efficiently without bins on streets. The current management of commercial waste in particular appears highly inefficient, with neighbouring businesses (shops etc) contracting different waste companies, which means that there are constantly bins on the pavement. The concepts which the Council is advocating for the concept ‘City Centre Transformation’ suggests a more co-ordinated approach to servicing businesses which is an opportunity to both reduce heavy (and*



*sometimes dangerous) traffic, and to improve walking space.*

**Contact:** [Waste@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Waste@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Guard rails (and bollards)

‘These can generally be removed following a Council assessment.’

*The vast majority of existing guard rail was installed long before the Council introduced its assessment protocol. All of this guard rail needs to be reassessed in order to minimise its use, and under a streamlined procedure, as the need for social distancing is likely to be a protracted one (see Section 6 below)]. This need is especially urgent with regard to longer sections of guard rail on narrower pavements.*

**Contact:** [roadsoperations@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:roadsoperations@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Other types of clutter

While the five types of clutter above posed the biggest problems, we identified plenty of other types of clutter in all four Localities covering the city. Advice from the South East Locality – on some of the most important of these – points to the scope for action by the Council and others. Our comments are added in italics.

## Utility / traffic signal cabinets

‘These are very costly to relocate. We are told that locations are assessed by Roads Officers and Planning Officers to find the best sites, but that they do need to be at specific points in order to provide a service for each utility or the relevant traffic signals.’

*However, the proliferation of utility (especially telecoms) cabinets, often in very inappropriate*

*locations for people walking, suggests that companies may have, in effect, a free hand to place cabinets where they like. It should be noted that utility cabinets and traffic signal cabinets are to some extent separate issues, as they involve different agencies.*

**Contact:** [roadsoperations@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:roadsoperations@edinburgh.gov.uk)  
(traffic signal cabinets)

## Bike parking

*This is another source of obstruction on pavements. More than 99% of formal cycle facilities (excluding the ‘Just Eat’ cycle hire scheme) are sited on pavements – taking space from pedestrians rather than motorists.<sup>11</sup> Unless precluded for exceptional safety reasons, the default position for bike parking structures should be on the carriageway.*

**Contact:** [ActiveTravel@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:ActiveTravel@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Phone boxes

*Many phone boxes are now disused – other than for advertising purposes – and even where the telephones are operational, boxes are not being properly maintained. We encountered many full of litter and other debris. They also often constitute a serious obstruction for pedestrians. We were informed that BT passes the costs for removal on to the Council, at what appears to be an exorbitant charge. This deters any action on the part of the Council – and there appears to be a need for Scottish Government intervention to ensure that either BT is compelled to remove them at its own cost, or Local Authorities are able to obtain funding to cover the costs.*

## Royal Mail ‘holding’ boxes

*Many of Royal Mail’s ‘holding’ boxes appear*

*not to be in use, and they are often old and rusty, as well as badly positioned from the pedestrian perspective. As with phone boxes, we would like to see a national initiative to remove redundant holding boxes, in consultation with Local Authorities – and at no public expense.*

## Litter bins and grit bins

‘Where these create an unnecessary obstacle, the Council’s transport and waste teams can review potential alternative locations and/or the size of the bins deployed – while ensuring that littering does not worsen as a result.’

**Contact:** [Waste@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Waste@edinburgh.gov.uk) (litter bins)  
or [roadsoperations@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:roadsoperations@edinburgh.gov.uk) (grit bins)

## Tables and chairs outside cafes and restaurants

‘The Council’s Environmental Wardens inspect these on a regular basis to ensure they are compliant with the permits issued (which define how much pavement space can be taken up). However, many permits will have been granted a long time ago, so will require re-assessment to ensure that the balance is right between clear, safe walking space for pedestrians and the amenity offered by outdoor eating and drinking facilities. The Council’s permit guidance is to be updated to reflect the Edinburgh Street Design Guidance, tying in with the policy of removing further street clutter following the success of the A-board ban.’

*Local Authorities charge businesses for permission to occupy pavements, so the management of tables and chairs (including enforcement) should be self-financing.*

**Contact:** [streetenforcement@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:streetenforcement@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Planters

‘Following the introduction of the A-board ban, Council planning and transport officers have been discussing the removal of planters where these cause an obstruction on the pavement.’

**Contact:** [streetenforcement@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:streetenforcement@edinburgh.gov.uk)

## Goods /merchandise on display

‘Section 129(9) of the Road Scotland Act 1984 forbids the placement of goods for sale on the public sections of the street. If alerted to such a problem, the Council can issue a statutory notice to the offending business and action then taken if they fail to comply.’

**Contact:** [customer.care@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:customer.care@edinburgh.gov.uk)  
as action on this problem involves the Street Enforcement, Road Permits and Planning sections of the Council!

## Bus shelters

‘These have to be placed 300-500mm from the kerb edge to ensure that they are not struck by passing vehicles, but the sides of shelters can be adjusted to remove any obstruction of the specified ‘Clear Walking Zone’ as set out in the Street Design Guidance.’<sup>12</sup>

## How do I report clutter problems to the Council?

The key Council contact addresses are listed above. If in doubt, contact [customer.care@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:customer.care@edinburgh.gov.uk)

You can also report clutter problems of any type to the independent FixMyStreet web site:  
<https://www.fixmystreet.com/>



# 6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

As our project was coming to an end, the Coronavirus pandemic arrived. One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic has been in the public realm: the requirement to maintain 2-metre ‘social distancing’. Given the levels of pedestrian traffic (even during the first and strictest phase of the lockdown), the widespread existence of narrow pavements and the ubiquitous presence of pavement clutter, this prompted the City of Edinburgh Council (and other Local Authorities) to plan for the introduction of temporary changes to the street layout, including the key requirement to widen pavement space. Transport Scotland has supported Local Authorities to do this, with a £30 million ‘Spaces for People’ fund, distributed through Sustrans Scotland.

It remains uncertain how long and to what degree ‘social distancing’ will remain in place, but it seems likely that ongoing pandemic precautions will need to incorporate extra pedestrian space – not just to move along pavements safely and comfortably, but also to allow for the space demands of queuing outside shops.

The principle of more and better space for pedestrians lies at the heart of the Council’s Street Design Guidance. The Coronavirus pandemic adds more urgency to that requirement, and decluttering pavements is a vital – and relatively low-cost – way of helping to deliver the strategy.



# 7. CONCLUSIONS

We have identified **two key themes** which underlie the ongoing problems with pavement clutter:

## (i) Resources

Roads staff face multiple requests for items to be placed on the street from many different sources (both within the Council and from external bodies). Resource constraints (both in terms of staffing and capital) limit the extent to which clutter (and the scope for removing it) is assessed.

Such requests from within the Council come from teams responsible for ‘Active Travel’, corporate communications, parking, planning, public transport, street cleansing, trams, etc. External bodies sometimes seem to assume indiscriminate entitlement to use the pavement for their own purposes: such as control boxes for utility companies (especially telecoms), roadworks signs and associated items (barriers, sandbags, cones etc), Royal Mail holding boxes and BT phone kiosks. We understand that Local Authorities have powers to permit, or deny, placing anything on ‘the footway’ (ie the pavement).

Together, these create a barrage of demands for pavement space which is hard for local teams to manage.

## (ii) Cultural / corporate / cross-departmental problems

Council Roads staff are overwhelmed. As a result they may avoid time-intensive activities which involve engagement with residents, such as asking permission to mount signs on buildings or railings, informally asking frontagers to cut back hedges, talking to businesses about pavement parking hotspots, or encouraging considerate placement of bins on the pavement. There is scope for a more engaged culture and operational style, less focused on technical interventions and more on fostering community understanding of, and support for, clearer pavements.

We noted the autonomy, and sometimes different ‘cultures’, of individual departments / sections within the Council – as a result of which there can be a lack of consistency in approach to pavement clutter specifically and street management generally.

In some cases, action to remove clutter may require a programmed, rather than an item-by-item, approach. Examples include obsolete (non-operational) ‘real-time’ parking availability signs and poorly-maintained or semi-derelict phone boxes. Clustering of clutter is a big problem – clutter attracts more clutter.



Another clear message is that inspection regimes are almost entirely focused on hazards and ‘defects’ – for example a *broken* traffic sign is likely to be reported, but not an *unnecessary* one. In response to all this, there seems to be a real opportunity to manage streets more ‘holistically’ – which should produce a better public realm, and perhaps also reduce costs.

More widely, the idea of ‘street managers’ has been advocated at Living Streets meetings from time to time – where a single official would take responsibility for a holistic view of streets. This links with the accepted importance of the ‘place’ function of the street, rather than it being seen purely as a ‘movement’ corridor. Currently a whole range of people have specific, but not joined-up responsibilities for individual categories of problem – Network Inspectors look at signs and potholes, Environmental Wardens at bins and A-boards, Parking Attendants at parking infringements, Lollipop men/women at safe crossing points, etc. Street Managers, with adequate powers, could have a dramatic impact on the quality of public space.

While the new Street Enforcement Service goes some way towards a more holistic approach to clutter, other aspects of the problem are the responsibility of up to seven other Council departments / sections.

Last, but not least, the influence of the Council’s Street Design Guidance – which has minimising clutter as one of its key principles – seems limited in practice. Just one example of this is that, despite the Guidance stating that vertical ‘No Loading’ signs should normally be removed, other Council managers have advised Locality staff that they disagree with the Guidance and that these signs should be kept.

**Through this project Living Streets Edinburgh has developed a better understanding of how ‘clutter’ comes about and how difficult it can be for local Roads staff to manage the problems. There can be historic reasons to explain the presence of some clutter: for example a guard rail on St Johns Road in Corstorphine used to provide protection at a busy bakery, but while it has long been closed, the guard rail remains.**

## Our next steps:

Over and above our recommendations for Council action (see Section 8 below), we believe that there are valuable insights from this project which will be useful to share with a much wider audience – community groups in Edinburgh, City of Edinburgh Council staff, other councils, and professional bodies and institutes. In addition to this report, we have prepared a short video - **link here** - to communicate the findings of our project more widely to bodies such as these. We will also keep in touch with Council staff and will continue to monitor what happens to the 290 plus items we recorded.

To keep in touch with what we’ve been doing, please see our **website** and **Twitter** account for further updates:

<https://www.livingstreetsedinburgh.org.uk/>  
**@LivingStreetsEd**

# 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the recommendations which we set out below, we make a distinction between (a) ‘soft’ measures which involve the Council’s overall approach to decluttering pavements as part of its wider transport and planning strategies, (b) targeted short-term ‘hard’ practical / physical measures needed to get rid of clutter, and (c) actions outwith Edinburgh to help reinforce change here in the city and across Scotland. *All these measures are essential to transform our streets.*

## (a) The Council’s corporate culture and direction

- i. At the top political and Chief Officer levels, inspired (and inspiring) leadership is needed to demonstrate *and deliver* corporate priority for holistic street management – creating safe, civilised and uncluttered space for pedestrians. This should be supported by prominent acknowledgement of the importance of recognising – on the city’s streets – walking’s place at the top of the transport hierarchy, as set out in *National Transport Strategy 2* and *Scottish Planning Policy*.
- ii. The Council should develop a holistic ‘street management’ function which ensures consistency and an appropriate ‘place-focused’ culture, with pavement decluttering as a key priority. There should be a systematic discussion of all types of pavement clutter, leading to a clear strategy – with targets, priorities and responsibilities clearly laid out.
- iii. High-level intervention is required to devote the necessary staffing and resources for this transformation – including transport staff dedicated to walking, as the latter’s needs are largely very different from cycling, which currently dominates the Active Travel section of the Council. It is not acceptable that there are *no* dedicated staff for walking, when it has such a fundamental role to play in the city’s future. Dedicated walking staff will be crucial to supporting the drive for decluttered pavements.

## (b) Targeted short-term actions on specific pavement clutter problems

Section 5 above highlighted how the many types of pavement clutter problem can be tackled. Some will take longer than others to resolve, but we suggest the following examples of potential ‘quick wins’:

1. Remove unnecessary signage poles and signs.
  - i. Remove giant obsolete ‘real time’ parking signs.
  - iii. Ask BT to remove damaged, poorly-used phone kiosks.
- iv. Ask residents – as part of a community-focused project, with appropriate funding – to



cut back hedges and branches which obstruct walking (this needs to be done in winter, before the growing and nesting season).

- v. Manage roadworks properly – implementing the ‘Red Book’ requirement that pavements be kept free of obstructions. The regulator (the Scottish Road Works Commissioner) has a role here in improving standards.
- vi. Undertake regular clear-ups of streets to remove low-grade roadworks debris such as cones, sandbags, old signs – potentially with Community Council engagement.
- vii. In the case of ‘temporary’ signs, phase out the use of those mounted on large 1,000kg yellow blocks and ensure that signs are affixed to lamp posts and other permanent structures.
- viii. Ensure that the default arrangement for bike parking is on the carriageway, not the pavement.

### **(c) Actions outwith Edinburgh**

National action and support can play an important part in reinforcing change here in Edinburgh and across Scotland. We recommend:

- i. A review by professional institutes and associations (such as the CIHT and IHE), of their professional training to encourage a culture among roads engineers which values decluttering and embraces the legislation (TSRGD 2016) which encourages and allows for a reduction in unnecessary signage. The effectiveness of TSRGD should also be reviewed, as it seems to have had little effect, certainly in Edinburgh.
- ii. Dissemination of this report to Local Authorities and other interested parties across Scotland.

### **References**

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/open-fund>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/council-commitments/delivering-sustainable-future?documentId=12620&categoryId=20141>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/open-fund>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/council-commitments/delivering-sustainable-future?documentId=12620&categoryId=20141>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/download/13723/edinburgh-street-design-guidance>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/24955/street-design-guidance-street-types-map>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/362/contents/made>
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- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/47052/national-transport-strategy.pdf> (pages 42-43)
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00453827.pdf> (para 273)
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/362/contents/made>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/24985/pt-2-bus-stops>



**Once you look for it, pavement clutter is everywhere!  
All of us can play a part in reporting and removing it.  
Together, we can Cut the Clutter!’**

**To find out more, go to:**  
<https://www.livingstreetsedinburgh.org.uk>



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