

Response to 'Spaces for People' proposals for Queensferry town centre

Joint submission from Cllr Kevin Lang and Cllr Louise Young

Thank you for providing us with a copy of the draft proposals for the Queensferry town centre.

We have engaged extensively with our constituents since the draft proposals were published on 23 July. As of today, we have heard directly from over 600 residents living in Queensferry and Dalmeny. This shows the level of interest which local people have for their High Street.

We have also spoken directly with the owners of a number of the small businesses on the High Street and who will inevitably be impacted by the proposed changes.

In terms of the views of residents, overall feedback on the proposals has been broadly favourable with 58% expressing support. 32% said they were opposed to the changes with the remaining 10% saying they did not have a strong view one way or another.

However, views vary significantly throughout the town. For example, from those we heard from and who live on the High Street, 84% were in favour compared to 16% opposed. For those residents living on or just next to Rosshill Terrace / Station Road, only 31% were in favour with 69% opposed.

We have carefully considered all the views expressed to us and wish to submit the following joint response.

It is clear the levels of traffic currently being seen on the High Street are causing significant challenges. The width of pavements and the requirement for social distancing is forcing people, including children, to walk onto the road. This creates unacceptable safety risks.

Similarly, the current two-way flow of traffic along the narrow High Street causes substantial congestion, particularly at weekends. It is all too easy for the street to become completely gridlocked. This congestion is not new and has been an issue for many years. However, the need for pedestrians and cyclists to socially distance means the safety issues have become even more pronounced.

To that end, we welcome the effort being made to try and create safer spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy the High Street. We also accept that removing vehicle traffic improves local air quality and make the High Street a much more pleasant area to visit.

Nevertheless, there are a number of unanswered questions relating to the plan put forward and a series of issues which we believe need to be addressed before changes are implemented.

1. **The risk of added congestion** - We are concerned the proposals, as currently presented, may not deliver the outcomes intended. The plans involve a barriered closure in the centre of the High Street. This means vehicles will still be able to enter the High Street both from the east at Edinburgh Road and the west from The Loan. Drivers will have to turn around in the central parking area only to be likely faced by oncoming traffic as they try to leave the High Street. As such, we believe there is a serious risk the plan will increase rather than reduce the congestion currently being seen. This concern is shared by the business owners we spoke with. We are keen to understand what consideration has been given to this by officers or if any modelling was carried out.

2. **On-street car parking** – it is not clear how many car parking spaces would remain along the High Street under the plans. Would the remaining on-street parking on the High Street be designated for residents and/or blue badge holders? Clarity on this point would be helpful.
3. **Residents parking** - the proposals include dedicated residents parking on the south side of Edinburgh Road. However, it is not clear how this will be administered and enforced. Will residents living on the High Street be required to pay for parking permits? If so, for what period of time? How many permits will be available and, if there are more residents parking permits required than space available, will residents be entitled to park in the Hawes car park without penalty (which is currently closed overnight until mid-August)?
4. **The time period for visitor parking** – It is not clear the basis for the two-hour time limit for visitors/shoppers to park within or next to the Hawes car park. With a unique collection of shops, cafes and restaurants, Queensferry offers a fantastic experience for visitors. We are concerned the two-hour limit will not provide sufficient time for visitors to both to enjoy a meal and spend time and money in local shops. This could be a particular issue for those with young children or those with reduced mobility. As such, we believe the time limit should be extended to at least three hours.
5. **Showing the High Street is 'open for business'** - we realise any temporary road closure requires diversion signage to be put in place. However, we are concerned that high impact red signage indicating “road closed” can act as a significant deterrent for visitors and business customers. This view is born from previous experience amongst High Street businesses. We would suggest the precise wording of the temporary signage is carefully reviewed to ensure it is made clear that the High Street is very much open for business. The signage at the junction of Bankhead Road and Hawes Brae could usefully include “Parking ahead for High Street”. Any ‘road closed’ signs should consider more positive wording such as “road closed to through traffic to support safe spaces for people” or similar – thus focusing on the positive.
6. **One-way system** – the £2 million project to improve the High Street over the long term settled on a scheme which would have involved moving to a one-way system. This was only dropped when advice from officers confirmed a substantial element of the external funding would be at risk due of the time required to progress the traffic regulation order and likely public inquiry. What consideration was given to introducing a one-way system on a temporary basis as a ‘spaces for people’ initiative? If this was considered, why was it rejected?
7. **The opportunity of a trial** – the changes being proposed would present a significant change to the town, with number of potential unintended knock-on impacts. To that end, what consideration has been given to the option of trialling the proposed changes over a weekend or two weekends when visitor numbers, pedestrian footfall and congestion are at their greatest? A trial would provide an opportunity to see if the changes meet the

spaces for people policy objectives, to development key learning points, and consider possible further changes.

8. **Station Road / Rosshill Terrace** – As we have already explained, the greatest concern expressed by our constituents has been around the diversion of traffic along Rosshill Terrace / Station Road. Amongst those residents who were opposed to the changes, more than 50% gave the proposed diversion as their most significant concern.

As councillors, we are anxious about diverting more traffic along narrow roads which are already handling far greater levels of traffic than they were built to accommodate. It is important to emphasise that Station Road includes two primary schools and one secondary school. With the schools confirmed to restart next month, we are extremely worried about the Council actively diverting traffic past areas with high levels of walking and cycling children.

If these changes are progressed then we believe further action is required urgently to discourage and, in some cases, restrict drivers from entering and departing the town via Station Road. This must be carried out prior to the proposed changes being implemented.

We would suggest;

- a) stopping HGV traffic along Rosshill Terrace / Station Road through a temporary traffic regulation order which introduces an appropriate weight restriction on these roads. This should exempt local buses.
- b) installing the long promised and considerably overdue speed-table on Rosshill Terrace as an urgent priority.
- c) writing to the Scottish Government to press, once more, for the FRB A90 slip roads to be reopened to cars. We note how locality transport officers at the Council have previously accepted the merits of re-opening these slip roads. Given the changes being proposed, coupled with the even great pressure expected from the Scotstoun and Echline housing developments, we believe the case for re-opening these slip roads is now overwhelming.

We hope this feedback is helpful. We are of course happy to discuss our views further with officers.

30 July 2020