

# RNIB Scotland response to the City of Edinburgh Council's consultation on George Street and First New Town Design Project.

RNIB Scotland is the leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people in Scotland. We deliver services our members need and campaign for their civil and welfare rights.

We appreciate the opportunity to input into this consultation and welcome the objectives which aim to ‘enhance pedestrian space, creating a safe vibrant place for all’ and ‘prioritise active travel and access for people with disability or impairment’. However in order to make the area accessible to people with a visual impairment some alterations need to be made including extending the traffic lights across the cycle way and building in physical delineation between the cycle way and the road and the cycle way and the pavement in the form of a kerb.

1. World Class Street Setting

Raised tables at junctions without any form of physical delineation would make it impossible for people with sight loss to tell when they have walked onto the road. We ask that physical delineation in the form of a kerb is built in so that people can tell when they have moved from the safe pedestrian area to the potentially dangerous road area. We also ask that traffic lights are built in across both car and bike areas allowing blind and partially sighted people to cross these areas safely and encouraging all pedestrians to cross at these designated points rather than informally.

The removal of street clutter is very welcome and will make the area easier to navigate for people with sight loss.

1. New seating areas with small scale planting

The plans appear to show the seating areas contained by waist high wooden borders. This will make it easier for long cane users to negotiate the seating areas. They will be able to feel the border with their stick, removing the risk of not being able to feel the chairs in the event that their stick goes between the chair legs, and the risk of feeling the chairs with their stick whilst someone is sitting in them which can be embarrassing and off-putting.

1. Walking

We welcome the intention to make it easier to walk on George Street. The absence of obstructions will make the area much easier to navigate for people with sight loss.

The plans indicate that continuous footways are planned at junctions - where detectable features under foot are removed. This would be very dangerous for blind and partially sighted people as there would not be physical features to tell them if they have walked onto the road. In order to make this area to be safe for blind and partially sighted people kerbs would need to be put in place at junctions, delineating the pavement from the road. We also ask that traffic lights are built into every junction. Without an audio or tactile cue, such as rotating cones or beeps on traffic lights, it is difficult for a blind person to know when it is safe to cross.

1. Access by bicycle

We would like to see cycling infrastructure rolled out in a consistent way across the city with clear measures built in to ensure it is safe to all users. We ask that the cycleway is a contrasting colour to the pavement and the road so that it is easier for people with partial sight to tell that the cycleway is not part of the pavement, and that there is physical segregation between the cycleway and the pavement and the cycleway and the road so that long cane users and guide dog owners are aware of where the cycle way starts and the pavement ends.

Guide dogs are trained to stop at kerbs and long cane users would be able to feel the edge of the cycle path with their cane if a kerb was built in. This would also minimise the risk of collisions between pedestrians and cyclists as pedestrians would be less likely to walk on the cycle way if there was a physical barrier discouraging them and long canes would be less likely to trip cyclists up if they were stopped by a kerb.

The tactile surface mentioned in the plans would not fulfil this role.

1. Access, parking and servicing

We are glad that there will still be vehicular access to the area and that blue badge parking will be prioritised. Parking is vital for people with mobility issues to access the street.

**Contact**

Please contact Dr Catriona Burness at catriona.burness@rnib.org.uk if you have any questions relating to this response.