

## 123 – Devil in the detail?



Councillors on the Transport, Infrastructure and Environment committee are to consider a proposal for a headline city centre development unaware that the supporting paperwork contains flaws that may make it illegal.

The proposal, for a £300M+ redevelopment of Charlotte Square, has traffic implications for a wide area of Edinburgh, as well as immediately adjacent streets.

The consortium promoting the development have understandably made it clear that their development stands or falls on a change in the Square from it's present central role in the traffic system to a virtually traffic free oasis.

The problem for Edinburgh Council is that the developers have already put up their giant crane and started work behind the famous Georgian buildings, before the legal support for the traffic changes is in place.

The assumption seems to be that the Traffic Regulation Order was a slam dunk, done deal, awaiting only a final endorsement by supportive councillors on the Traffic Infrastructure and Environment committee at City Chambers..

However this may not be the case after the discovery that the traffic modelling to predict the effects of effectively sealing off Charlotte Square fails to meet statutory requirements in

modelling the effects of the proposed TRO, rather than, as it does now, only model the effects of selected parts of the TRO.

The traffic modelling failed to study the effect of HGV displacement, although the scheme is committed to imposing a ban on all vehicles above 7.5 tonnes including buses.

This leaves the TRO exposed to challenge on the basis that it is not legal.

**Dr Ashley Lloyd**, a long standing opponent of Edinburgh Council's policy of forcing former main road traffic down residential streets and Chairman of the Council sponsored Workshops process for dealing with traffic effects in residential areas said: "The rules are there for a reason, and that is to stop developments having bad effects on the environment in general and specifically lives and health of people ."

"Many streets in Edinburgh, across the New Town, and increasingly further afield are already feeling the effects of the enormous loss of capacity in the road system because of the tram."

"The Council prefer to portray this loss as merely a temporary condition, to be put up with while the line is built. But this is simply not true as can be seen from the plans of streets *after* the tram construction ends."

"The Charlotte Square scheme is not connected to the Tram Project itself, but it is another scheme, one in which the hidden costs are shifted from the balance sheet of the development to ordinary people in the streets affected and then the public purse."

"The traffic study accompanying the TRO was already the subject of criticism for omitting the 24X7 impacts, but by completely omitting the displacement of heavy vehicles into residential streets in effect the TRO is being discussed without any understanding of what the impacts will be outside the restricted zone that Charlotte Square will become."

**Allan Alstead**, another resident who has expressed doubts about the tram project and has worked on the Workshops process, said: “ There is a enormous redrawing of the traffic map going on in Edinburgh, without anyone in the council making that new map available to the public.””

“Traffic experts recognise that Edinburgh has a unique set of conditions that create a unique set of problems.”

“Indeed it is this combination of conditions that also create the city we all love, and which has attracted worldwide acclaim for so many years:”

“But the decision to try and ignore the road traffic facts of life in the city, the extent to which commercial success and everyone’s prosperity relies on car, van, and LGV/HGV transport, is the root cause of so many things that are going wrong whether with this scene, the tram, or so much else.”

“The central problem is that the Council consistently pretend that blocking main through routes somehow has no effect on traffic flows elsewhere.”

“It is not a problem that they are unaware of and they know that this traffic will head off down more and more residential streets as the system becomes progressively unable to cope --- but to lull the public they pretend this isn’t so.”

“The Charlotte Square proposal is admirable in many ways but because it’s backers realise the miserable effects of traffic on ordinary life they want the Square ‘calmed’ and in effect largely emptied of through traffic, that is the effect of their changes and it is patronising nonsense to claim otherwise.”

“The Council in their desperation are now rigging the debate to try and deliver this to them. If the councillors don’t wake up they could compound the distress in which the administration presently wallows by forcing through a vote on paperwork that is not fit for purpose.”

“This is the latest example of a distressing tendency to not only spin selected facts, but actively suppress unwelcome truths. Instead of this kind of governance delivering a better life and a better city it is destroying both. Councillors need to start standing up to the officials and the lawyers’ brow beating them, and give proper scrutiny to the proposals placed before them, and where, like this one, they are not legal—throw them back and demand better.

The mandarins of Waverley Court can then go along to face the Developers and explain to them why law and proper process matters.

Journalists can use existing contact details for the two people quoted.