

CHARLOTTE SQUARE: LIES, DAMN LIES AND **NO**

STATISTICS?

- We have recently had some tantalising glimpses of a scheme for a part of the city that, for once, justifies the use of the word iconic: Charlotte Square.
- A development funded in the main by a Russian businessman holds out the opportunity of converting the Square from a streetscape that is frankly a bit of a mess, into a location that will justify it's worldwide reputation--- home to a world class hotel and office development and with the high quality paving and road surfacing, street furniture and all the rest to set the seal on it.
- So what's not to like?

The answer is maybe nothing...but probably everything, because as usual, Edinburgh Council, appear so transfixed by a glittering vision that they are ignoring the basics of identifying not only what it means for the Council tax and Business tax rake off, or for the big businesses, rich tourists and visitors, who come and go --- but more importantly what it means for the people who actually *live* in the city and the safeguarding of whose welfare is the main reason for the existence of the council in the first place.

The traffic modelling 'detail' will, we are assured, be available when the TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) required by the development is advertised.

It doesn't seem to occur to our Council that the Charlotte Square scheme already carries the same disquieting hallmarks that have been such a feature of the Tram project disaster.

By holding back the figures, yet publicising the plan, it inevitably means the plan will be presented as the 'preferred option' whether or not explicitly labelled as such, and the vehicles displaced as 'an external' or unfortunate side-effect of this 'preferred' plan.

Despite the risks of not including traffic displacement in the equation, and the potential consequential costs in the balance sheet for the city that including it may bring, the Council seem oblivious to the fact that this amounts to an admittance that the potential health and environmental risks are always seen by them as standing outside any project planning process in Edinburgh.

If the health impacts are so serious as to threaten a project by making it unfeasible in its initial form, then surely the rule ought to be 'so be it, we must go back to the drawing board.'

But in both this scheme as in the Tram Project health and environmental impacts have been treated as some sort of optional add-on to the main event, to be publicised in their favourable aspect, but suppressed in respect of the risks. It is precisely this failure that is continuing to cause the tram project to unwind.

Judging by recent media releases the Council themselves suddenly seem to be waking up to the undeniable effects of too much traffic in residential areas, but this awakening is extremely belated, and it has to be said, very partial.

Deteriorating health and life shortening impacts arising from planning decisions, are not considered add-ons in countries that the Scottish Government would like to be bracketed with—they are considered vital elements of the planning process that must sit alongside 'economic development' and 'Transport' from the very first moment.

This continued treatment of health and environmental effects as being unnecessary to the planning process is evidence of a planning process unfit for purpose in the 21st Century. It is one of the major points of failure in the whole Tram project debacle, as in the Charlotte Square scheme

The city cannot afford, either financially or reputationally, to blunder ever onward, treating valid environmental and health concerns as inconvenient truths to be ignored if they endanger

this or that pet project. To trumpet concern in 'The Southern Arc' for a problem of traffic created pollution while at the same time pursuing plans such as the Charlotte Square scheme in which huge increases in traffic created pollution is totally ignored is both schizophrenic and dishonest.

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