

How to be a Cycling Flat-Dweller

Want to use a bike for every-day travel, but live in a flat with nowhere to store one?

BIKE STORAGE FOR TENEMENTS & FLATS, JAN 2011

“No storage facilities in flat, and would be unable to keep in the stair. Would love to have a bike!”

Edinburgh is increasingly a cycling city, and both Spokes and the City of Edinburgh Council want to help more people to cycle more often¹. However, a big hurdle for many residents is having nowhere to store a bike at home. Storage options for tenements in particular are often very limited, with bikes kept in hallways or bedrooms in preference to chaining to lamp-posts or railings. Security is a big issue, given theft rates, and of course leaving a bike out in the rain is best avoided.

This factsheet suggests possible solutions that might help you have and use a bike for your everyday travel, with practical tips and relevant contacts. It's aimed at existing cyclists facing storage problems, as well as potential cyclists – many more people might get and use a bike for every-day travel if only there was somewhere to keep it. Hopefully this will suggest actions to take, by yourself or jointly with your neighbours.

Everyone's situation is different, so various options are needed: in-flat, in-stair, back-green or on-street, taking account of the factors relevant to the wide variety of Edinburgh housing. Considerations include:

- What type of bike do you want to store – full-size or folding?
- How many bikes – actual and potential - need to be stored where you live?
- What could you do to improve the security of your existing bike storage?
- What other space might be used? Where is it and who owns it?
- What are your neighbours' thoughts on bike storage where you live?
- What permissions might be required? Landlords, other owners, Building Control / Planning etc.



The Problem!!

[photo: Tpi]

Below, we look at some of the practical options for improving your current situation, as follows:

Section 2 - **Tackling storage as an individual flat-dweller: bike choice, security and in-flat options**

Section 3 - **Tackling storage at stairwell-level, both inside and outside**

Section 4 - **Regulations and permissions that might apply**

Section 5 - **Tackling storage at community level (e.g., using on-street facilities)**

¹The new City of Edinburgh Council *Active Travel Action Plan* contains a target of 15% of journeys to work to be bike by 2020 (currently 5-6%), with 10% of all journeys by bike by then (currently 2%).

2. TACKLING STORAGE AS AN INDIVIDUAL FLAT-DWELLER

2.1 Choose a Bike with Storage in Mind

If you don't already own a bike, think carefully before buying about what type might best meet your needs, bearing in mind where it will be kept as well as what it's for. If you're likely to need to carry it upstairs to your flat, it might be worth paying a bit extra for something more light-weight. If you're leaving it elsewhere, bear in mind that you will then have to invest in good quality security devices.

Folding bikes might suit if ground-level storage is a problem. Bromptons are probably the best-known, though there is an ever-expanding selection of folders on the market now. These can be extremely useful for commuting to work or study (especially if you might also need to jump on the bus or train too), as they store compactly as well as being easily portable when folded. They're also handy for rail- or bus-based cycling weekends and holidays.



A neatly folded Brompton in a tenement hallway:
[John Welford]

2.2 Who Moved my Bike? - Make Your Bike as Secure as Possible

Obviously, any bike stored outside your flat is at more risk of theft than one stored inside, so make it as hard as possible for thieves to move it. Always use a decent lock, and ideally two, to lock both wheels (particularly quick-release ones) as well as the frame to something immovable - or something else at least, as an 'anchor'. Insurance is unlikely to cover bike theft if the bike is not secured to an immovable object. Look for the 'Sold Secure' logo (www.soldsecure.com). Although this won't guarantee the lock cannot be broken, it will be pretty robust. Generally, more expensive locks provide better security, though make sure you use locks in the most effective way possible. Some practical advice on lock types and features is available from www.bikeradar.com/gear/article/buyers-guide-to-bike-locks-20408. Make sure that the saddle is secured to the bike, or you may lose it, and remove accessories such as lights and panniers.

When thinking about where to lock your bike, ensure common-sense precautions are in place, particularly around stairwell access. Get stairwell door locks fixed and used. Talk to your neighbours about keeping doors shut. Remember that handrails and banisters are very easy for thieves to force or cut to release a bike, and expensive to fix. Particularly if you lock your bike up outside, make sure that it is not liable to slip down from where it is placed, to avoid temptation to vandals who like stamping on wheels. Also consider getting an inexpensive waterproof bike cover if you store your bike outside (especially if in a private garden), to keep the rain off as well as screen it from thieves. See the Bike Station's website for additional tips (www.thebikestation.org.uk/how-to-lock-your-bike). The police also strongly advise registering and security-marking bikes (www.bikeregister.com) and possibly installing an electronic tag.

2.3 Keeping a Bike in Your Flat

Whilst taking a bike up and down stairs is not ideal, in-flat storage should at least offer securer storage, and a bit of organisation can help. Various space-saving devices can make in-flat bike storage tidier and easier, including hooks, brackets and ceiling pulleys/hoists to hang bikes up out of the way. Typically these are relatively cheap to buy, and fairly straightforward to install using a bit of DIY common-sense (or a local handy-man), though pulley/hoist systems can be trickier - make certain that fixtures are securely attached to joists, beams etc. Some planning and organisation might mean you can fit more bikes than you'd think into any given space, e.g. by having two wall-brackets, one above the other. In addition to bike shops, DIY or hardware stores can be cost-effective sources of fixings. There are literally hundreds of storage solutions available and prices can vary considerably. We do not make specific recommendations, but a database with some information on different types of equipment currently on the market is on the Spokes website – see www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/downloads/technical-and-research/spokes-tenementsflats-bike-storage-project.

Things to consider include: bike weight and wall-quality (follow manufacturers' advice); protection for wall/floors from bike dirt, especially in wet weather; and what clearance space you need to move around the bike (e.g. handlebars) or to allow doors to open adequately if bikes are to be stored behind one. Some brackets fold flat against the wall when not in use. If you're a tenant, you may need to seek permission from your landlord if you intend to fix equipment to the walls or ceilings of your flat. Other options might be more straightforward, e.g. free-standing bike racks.

A wall-mounted two-cycle hanger (folds up when not in use; requires heavy duty wall bolts to be fitted)



Wall hook behind door - from hardware store [Melanie Main]



A hallway of bikes – 5 in total! Two on the floor, one wall mounted and two hanging from the ceiling [Malcolm Fraser]

3. TACKLING STORAGE AT STAIRWELL-LEVEL

3.1 Get Organised

Many residents find storing their bikes in flats simply impossible, and instead resort to leaving them in stairwells even though storage here is often limited by space as well as fire safety considerations. The first and most straightforward step is to look at whether existing space could be used better. Talk to your neighbours about how bikes (and other things stored in the stairwell) are arranged. Maybe with a bit of planning and cooperation, more bikes could be stored? Better-organised bike storage might also bring other advantages for many stairwells, in terms of general tidiness, fire safety and accessibility to back-greens, as well as making stairwells less attractive to potential thieves by improving security.

3.2 Clear Abandoned Bikes

A common complaint is that potential communal storage spaces such as stairwells, cellars or sheds are cluttered with ‘dead’ or unused bikes. Removing these can often ease the situation considerably. Make sure you use a clear process, to ensure no unintended ‘theft’ of apparently abandoned bikes. The Bike Station’s website has a factsheet on clearing abandoned bikes (www.thebikestation.org.uk/donating/). Again, talk to your neighbours!

3.3. Fixtures and Fittings

If the only place to store a bike is against a wall or railings in a shared stairwell, make sure the wheels and frame are securely locked with a good quality D-Lock/cables. Bear in mind that railings can be broken easily by thieves, and can be costly to repair.

Bike security and accessibility in stairwells might be improved through some relatively simple measures, such as:

- ‘Anchors’ to provide useful points for locking bikes, either rings secured to wall or floor, or free-standing heavy ones.
- Wall-mounted brackets or racks (see above for ‘in-flat’ solutions).
- Bike stands, e.g., the classic ‘Sheffield rack’, possibly as a ‘toast-rack’ (two or more bike stands welded to a base frame which rests on the ground).
- Lockable containers (which should be fire proof), for one or multiple bikes.



Wall rack [Steve Leslie]

However, you should be aware of the constraints posed by Building Control (4 below). Ideally, to comply with fire regulations, nothing should be stored in the open stairwell or corridors and bike storage facilities should be separate, i.e. in fire-proof boxes or under-stair cupboards or coal-cellars with fire-proof doors.

If you *do* use the stairwell for your bike, crucially, ensure that it will not obstruct people from using the stair and reaching the exit, particularly in case of fire. The emergency services **must** be able to reach all parts of the building. Obviously, be considerate to your neighbours' needs or you risk complaints to the Council; both the CEC Fire Officer and the Fire Brigade have powers to remove bikes that they feel are blocking safe exit. If there is no other option and your neighbours do not object, apply common-sense. There should be clear access of at least 800mm (standard door width), and make sure that bikes are secure and not likely to fall. Minimise equipment left with the bike, especially anything that might burn (e.g., panniers).



Stairwell vertical bike racks, bespoke [TPi]



Stairwell Toast-rack - Sheffield stands welded to a base frame which rests on the floor [Sam Anwar]

3.4 Storing Bikes Outside (within the tenement boundary)

First identify possible spaces – e.g., in shared back-greens (or possibly frontage), or coal cellars / sheds. Next, talk to fellow residents and flat owners about using these for bike storage. Various options might be considered (the database on the Spokes website provides links to possible current suppliers):

- Hoops or bars attached (securely) to external walls, to which to lock bikes and improve security.
- Bike racks such as Sheffield stands, if appropriate space (ideally hard-standing). Various options exist for fixing covers over them too. ‘Cycle-hoop’ fittings for lamp-posts (e.g. see www.greenerleith.org/greener-leith-news/2010/10/27/cyclehoops-arrive-at-last.html) might be useful if there’s no space for racks but suitable vertical supports.
- Lockers and sheds, though bear in mind cost and the various consents required (4 below).

An imperfect bike storage solution may still represent a significant improvement and help resolve conflicts over using space, especially if implemented together with some of the other practical suggestions above. However, in addition to the physical constraints of the available space, you should bear in mind: (a) the cost / security trade-off and (b) whether any building control or other regulatory constraints apply - see 4 below.

3.5 Tackling Bike Storage Collectively

Building and maintaining good relations with neighbours can really help if you’re wanting to make practical improvements to achieve better bike storage where you live, whether that’s through simple actions such as improving entry-door security, or through physical installations of equipment. Obviously informal arrangements can work very well in some circumstances. In others, particularly where the turnover of residents is high (and / or where many residents are tenants, perhaps students), Stair Committees or Owners’ Associations may be of value. These create formal arrangements whereby owners can reach

agreements more easily on repairs and maintenance as well as new facilities (including bike storage). [NB 'Improvements', such as installing bike racks, require agreement by all owners under the Tenement Act, whereas 'Repairs/Maintenance' require only a majority.] The Council website (www.edinburgh.gov.uk) has a quick guide to organising an owners' association...
www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/1392/quick_guide_to_organising_an_owners_association

Advice and info for home-owners is also available from Homeworks (www.edinburgh.gov.uk/homeworks; tel: 0131 529 7240). Homeworks is a Council service offering a range of impartial advice and practical assistance to homeowners on improving, repairing or maintaining their property. Letwise is a source of advice for private tenants and landlords – www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/1053/private_housing.

4. REGULATIONS AND PERMISSIONS THAT MIGHT APPLY

Note - Whilst the information here is believed to be correct at the time of going to press, regulations and permitted development rights etc change from time to time.

Many residents are unaware of or confused about what building controls, planning constraints or other regulations might apply when thinking about bike storage.

a). Building Control, particularly in relation to fire safety, can pose a significant constraint to installing bike storage. Fire regulations mean that, really, no item should be stored in the stairwell or access route from the stairwell to the main entrance of the building. Furthermore, a mainly 'enclosed' facility - such as a cycle locker - should not be situated outside a tenement within 3 metres of its external wall or within 1 metre of the boundary wall, hedge or other boundary defining feature. This applies even to a relatively small structure. Considerations centre on the structure's stability and the risk of fire-spread if it is enclosed and especially if it is adjacent to a wall or under windows (to be avoided). External covered racks outside flats (e.g. in garden space) may be acceptable, but might still require Building Warrant, especially for tenement properties. If you want advice, contact Building standards on 0131 529 7826 (central) / 529 4644 (North) / 4655 (South) or email buildingwarrant.applications@edinburgh.gov.uk. Sketches can be taken for free advice from the duty surveyor at the CEC Waverley Court offices.

b). Planning permission might potentially be required for any storage facility which is external to and within the curtilage of a flatted property (tenement or otherwise). [NB Storage within the curtilage of an individual dwelling-house might fall within 'permitted development rights' and so not need planning permission]. Unlike individual dwelling houses, flats have NO permitted development rights, so even relatively small bike storage boxes are subject to planning permission. For properties in conservation areas (and there are now 40 such areas in Edinburgh), additional consent is needed, as permitted development rights do not apply. Special regard will be given to the effect any development has on the character and appearance of the conservation area. Developments at the front of properties are likely to be particularly contentious, given general presumptions against changing established building lines. For advice, contact the Planning & Building Standards Department – 0131 529 3571 or email; planning@edinburgh.gov.uk. There is a Planning & Building Standards portal at www.edinburgh.gov.uk.

c). Given the large number of historic buildings in Edinburgh, **Listed Building** constraints may apply, regardless of whether the facility proposed is internal or external, if it would affect the 'character or appearance' of the building. Contact the Listed Buildings Team – 0131 529 3550 or email listed.buildings@edinburgh.gov.uk. Regardless of the listed category of the building (A,B or C) it is necessary to check on an individual basis whether the proposal will be considered to affect the character of the building, even if equipment won't actually be attached to it and the change would be easily reversible.

5. COMMUNITY-LEVEL SOLUTIONS: ON-STREET STORAGE

“There really isn't space for cycle storage on the back green or in the stairwell, if there was we'd have used this solution before now. In my street we really need on-street parking.”

Even if the suggestions earlier in this factsheet around in-flat, stairwell or back-green storage seem impossible for your situation, there is still hope! One course of action is to talk to your local councillors (each ward has either 3 or 4 councillors) about the potential for on-street bike storage. Given the constraints posed by internal space and building regulations, on-street bike storage needs to be considered very seriously if Edinburgh is to achieve the significant increase in everyday cycling that the Council is seeking. Encouragingly, Edinburgh Council's 2010 *Active Travel Action Plan* refers specifically to piloting on-street residential bike storage by the year 2013. Spokes is actively encouraging the Council and others to press ahead with this as soon as possible.

Some improvements might be made simply through installing more racks on the pavement outside tenements, although for overnight storage there may be security, vandalism and/or weather concerns. However if you have a specific location in mind which you think might work, on-street cycle parking can be suggested by emailing cycling@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Or, you could lobby for more secure solutions such as storage shelters or even lockers. Bear in mind the trade-off for different options between likelihood of success and additional cost / design issues – the more robust (and expensive) the facility, the stronger you'll have to argue your case. Ask for solutions you consider appropriate for your situation, giving as much detailed information as possible to support your case, particularly ... numbers of residents, cyclists, current usage (cars parked, footway space etc.) To find names/emails of your local councillors go to www.edinburgh.gov.uk/councillors, 0131 529 3186. Email is usually firstname.secondname@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Another option might be to negotiate use of a temporary or permanent unused room in a nearby building (if the owner can be identified) to provide communal storage for a group of tenements. Of course, access arrangements would need to be designed and agreed, with security in mind, and with appropriate management – for example, as residents move on. A key-based access system might be possible (or possibly using a smartcard), with an agreed rental for specified periods. Costs might be quite reasonable if shared across enough people – so, as with all communal solutions, talk to your fellow residents.



On-street Sheffield racks
[Cycling England]



Dutch-style 'Bread-bin' [Presto factsheet]



On-street lockers [Cycledock]

6. GETTING SECURITY ADVICE

Security advice on any of the points and solutions in this factsheet can be sought from Police crime prevention officers - phone 0131 311 3131.

7. AND FINALLY...

The Spokes campaign to improve residential bike storage continues to develop, and this fact-sheet represents work-in-progress. Feedback and suggestions would be very welcome – email spokesbikestorage@spokes.org.uk Do you have a solution that might be helpful to others too? We'd love to hear of any actions you or neighbours have taken to improve your bike storage, and we hope to compile a set of case studies to inspire others across the city, so please send them in! More information and any future updates will be available from the Spokes Tenements Storage Project webpage... www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/downloads/technical-and-research/spokes-tenementsflats-bike-storage-project.

You might also be interested in related work by other Cycle Campaigns. e.g. London Cycling Campaign's page of cycle parking and storage (www.lcc.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=66) and Cambridge Cycle Campaign's "How to Provide Cycle Parking: a Step-by-Step Guide for Planners and Providers" - (www.camcycle.org.uk/resources/cycleparking/guide).

Want to cycle more, and looking for information??

www.spokes.org.uk – Spokes campaigns for better conditions for using a bike for your everyday work and leisure journeys. We also produce excellent cycle maps for Edinburgh and the Lothians, run Sunday rides, and have all sorts of useful website information.

www.thebikestation.org.uk – Edinburgh's bicycle recycling and cycling promotion charity. Quality re-conditional bikes at good prices

www.citycyclingedinburgh.org – cycling discussion forums, info

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cycling - Edinburgh City Council information on cycling to work, local cycling maps, other useful weblinks / organisations

Support us by joining Spokes! *www.spokes.org.uk - membership*

You don't have to be an 'activist' or attend regular meetings. We need your moral support; we want to tell you about impending developments in your area; we want to suggest when and how you could write to the council or to your MSPs so that *you* help improve conditions for everyday cycling by everybody. The storage project would not have happened without the backing of a large and supportive membership!

It's our future



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The information in this factsheet is offered in good faith, and best efforts have been made to ensure its accuracy. However, it does not constitute advice, and Spokes can take no responsibility for the consequences of following it. Mention of particular suppliers does not imply endorsement.