

[Email to all councillors, as this is going to the full council for a final decision, following approval by the Planning Committee]

To all members of the City of Edinburgh Council

15/04318/PPP – Proposed Development East of Milburn Tower

Report to Council on 2nd June 2016

Dear Councillors

I write on behalf of Spokes to ask you to impose a planning condition for the development of this site to the effect that high quality pedestrian and cycling facilities are provided to cross the roads between the Development site and the Gyle Centre and rail tram interchange. Three options for doing this are given at the end of this paper. Without such a crossing residents of the northern part of the Development will have no effective active travel access to these facilities that are so physically close. In consequence less active travel and more car journeys will arise, contrary to Council environmental and transport policies.

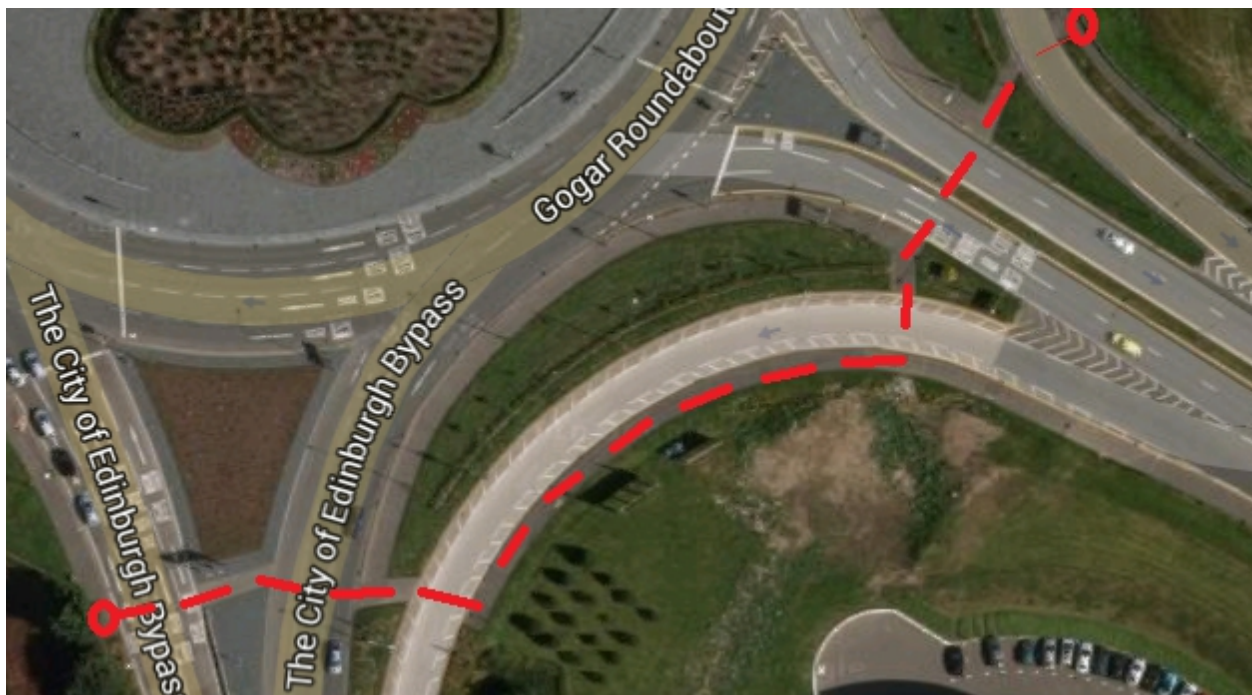
The Council meeting on 2nd June will decide on the planning application for this Development. The Development Management Committee who discussed proposals for the Development on Monday 16th May removed a proposed requirement of the type Spokes are hoping you will re-establish. It should be noted that the Committee were concerned about the connectivity of the site and the decision to remove the requirement for a crossing upgrade (not unanimous) was tied in with a decision about a vehicle bridge. The Committee also had the impression that the existing crossing facilities were well used. This is not accurate.

Another key factor which influenced the Committee was the idea that the developer would provide transport infrastructure at subsequent planning stages as it was “in their interests to provide a development that works” such that barriers to good site connectivity would be overcome. Spokes accept that this may be the case for vehicle traffic but don't think it applies (unfortunate though this is) to active travel infrastructure in the same way.

The Existing Crossing of the City Bypass (and Gyle access road)

To cross the bypass from the Gogar side to the Gyle side or vice versa means crossing fourteen lanes of traffic and seven different carriageways (see overhead photo below). Traffic speed limits over all these carriageways is 40 MPH. Although sight lines are reasonable, it is about as unattractive a road crossing as it is possible to be. It is only really usable by the fit and the confident. It would be very unwise to cross with children and out of the question for the elderly and people with mobility impairments.

Crossing the Bypass from the Gogar to Gyle.

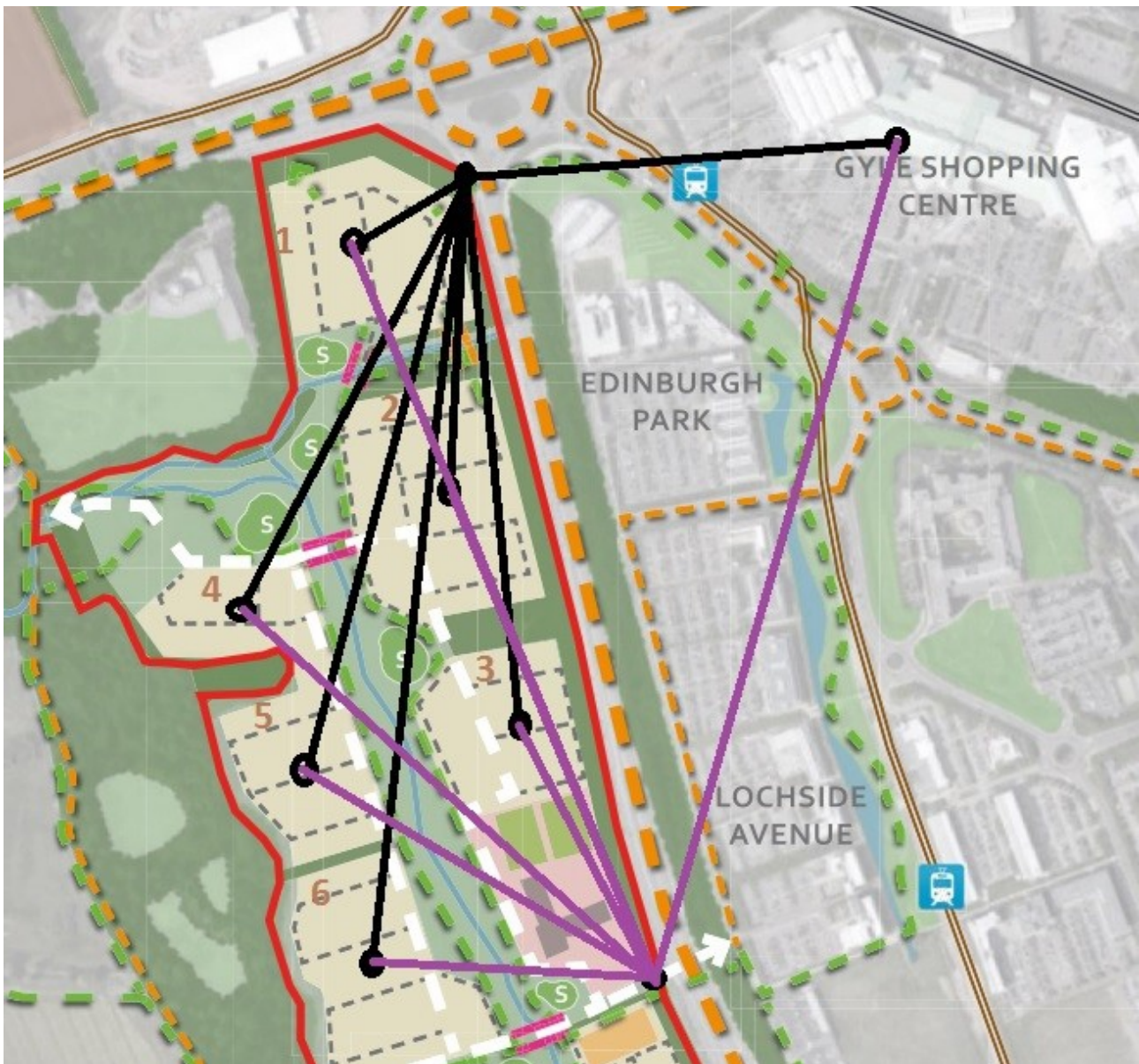


A Spokes member visited the crossing in the morning of Thursday the 19th of May between 7:20 and 9:20AM. They saw 12 pedestrians and 11 cyclists use the crossing of the City Bypass . Although this was only one day Spokes is fairly sure the crossing is not well used generally.

The Implications of Providing no Upgrade

The Developer's outline site plan is shown in Diagram One. It has been appended with lines showing how active travel journeys could be made to the Gyle Centre from the northern part of the site. The developers blocks of housing in the northern part of the site have been given numbers from 1 to 6. Lines in black show journeys that would arise if the northern crossing of the bypass were used whereas the purple lines show alternative active travel routes should the main site underpass be used.

Diagram One :Active Travel Routes to the Gyle Shopping Centre



Although this method is somewhat crude it provides an impression of approximate journey lengths. It shows that for blocks 1,2,3,4 and 5 (probably about half of all the development's housing) active travel distances are all increased if an attractive crossing at the northern end of the bypass is not available. If the crossing is left as it is, it will only be used by a small number of residents of the development and as such the Gyle Centre and Rail/Tram Interchange which are relatively close are likely to be accessed mainly by car or not at all. This would make a nonsense of the Council's environmental and transport policies encouraging active travel.

A Crossing Upgrade – Condition of Planning Permission or Not

Although providing poor vehicle connectivity would likely impact on the Developer's property sales, it is unlikely to be the case that the same will apply to active travel provisions. It would be an unusual prospective home buyer who would calculate - *as the active travel links to the Gyle are so poor I will not buy*. Accordingly it seems unlikely that the developer will provide significant investment to upgrade facilities unless they are required through the imposition of a site condition of planning permission, which the Council would need to apply on 2nd of June.

Crossing Upgrade Possibilities

Active travel at the north end of the city bypass could be facilitated by either

1. a series of at-grade light controlled crossings;
2. a new underpass spanning the bypass and Gyle access road; or
3. an overbridge with ramped and stair access at either side

The contractor should be required to explore these with the Council and agree to pay for the one agreed to.

Conclusion

Unless the Council require the developer to provide an upgrade to the crossing as a condition of developing the site, about half of the site's properties will have a convoluted and unnecessarily lengthy walking or cycling journey to the Gyle Centre and rail tram interchange. This will have the effect of suppressing active travel journeys from the site and increasing those made by car.

Other Active Travel Considerations of the Development

Finally, in addition to the major issue in this document, we strongly support the RBS Bicycle User Group who are seeking to maintain the high quality cycling provision on Gogar Station Road and/or a route through the proposed Development, which is direct, continuous and fully suitable for commuting from the Union Canal to the A8. We hope the Council will ensure that good quality safe cycling links are maintained through the construction phases and on completion of the development should planning permission be approved.

Euan Renton
Spokes Planning Group