

19/02604/FUL Gyle Centre Extension

<https://citydev-portal.edinburgh.gov.uk/idoxpa-web/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=PSD8WCEWHUP00>

Objection on behalf of Spokes, the Lothians Cycle Campaign

We object to this application on a number of grounds: the excessive car parking; the lack of a clearly-defined cycle route from the NW entrance, near Morrison's, to the Centre (ie to the main entrance); the lack of a clearly-defined cycle route from the north-east side, ie from the path connecting to the South Gyle residential area and beyond; the lack of ditto from the entrance to the Tram Stop; and finally the lack of a clearly-defined cycle route west-east across the whole, ie from the A8 underpass to the South Gyle residential area.

Most of these are long-standing deficiencies, but the addition of two extensions at the front (south) side merely makes them worse, by extending even further this outdated, monolithic creation with its jagged contours.

The site as a whole is almost totally hemmed in by railways and major roads. The south side, which is potentially the most open, consists of one huge car park, divided into sections by hedges, making overall views of destinations and what the documents happily call 'wayfaring', very difficult. From the south it's like entering a maze, with no guidance; from the east (the cycle path), the same; from the west (the underpass) one is confronted by a huge blank, featureless wall.

1 Car parking

The proposed extensions reduce the parking a little, but for modern times there is still far too much. The site is well served by the tram and a railway station with frequent trains, and by several bus routes, some of which even start or terminate there - and these buses run all day, and even have night services. So there is no excuse for such extensive car parks; the site would be much more accessible without them; and this valuable land, with such good public transport links, could be put to better purpose.

2 Cycle routes

Despite the hemmed-in nature of the site, there are two excellent cycle routes into it, and one potential route to the south. Both of the good existing cycle routes, however, are under-used, simply because there is no connection across the site, and hence no-one knows of their existence.

To the north-west, the A8 underpass could be part of a major east-west cycle route linking the City Centre to the Airport, with multiple destinations in between; to the east, this route would continue through and past South Gyle, roughly parallel with the railway, to the city.

To the south, a cycle route could lead to the Edinburgh Park business district and other destinations via shared-use footways, again offering a major route for cycle commuting.

The existing Gyle Centre blocks ALL this potential, and from what we can see, the proposed Extension will make it no better, and possibly even worse.

It is ironic that millions have been spent to create the A8 underpass and provide a potentially excellent east-west route from city to Airport, but the Gyle Centre not only hides the entrance but also makes it extremely difficult to know how to proceed eastwards from it, through this un-coordinated, erratic mass of buildings and a maze of car parks. There is even no indication of how to get to the main entrance of the Centre itself, as the D+A admits (01, p.12).

3 The documentation

One might expect the D+A Statement to address these problems, and to an extent it does, but it is so disorganised that the overall principles of the design are not apparent. There is no clear statement on Access, for example; the D+A consists of no fewer than 12 separate documents, with no index, and no overall structure in terms of chapters; one cannot find the contents of each document without actually opening it, a tedious and time-wasting process.

Furthermore the aspirations in the text, some of which are quite good, do not seem to be borne out by the actual plans.

For example, there is mention of a “transformed pedestrian cross route from east to west” (D+A, 4.5, p.60), which is just what we want - (so long as it includes cyclists too, preferably segregated) - but this route appears nowhere on the plans, and all the plans I saw did not show it where one might have expected it - (eg the “Landscape Plan as Proposed” document doesn't have it (and oddly, it doesn't have much landscape either)).

The “photo-montages” document is good for showing how hostile the car-park environment looks from a pedestrian's or cyclist's point of view, but there's nothing on what is to be done to alleviate this.

Section 2.1 of the D+A has timely comments on the “lack of signage and wayfaring, combined with overgrown trees and shrubbery ...unsightly service yard entrances, access [to these yards] cutting through a shared-use pedestrian area (pp 14ff); the Train Station Approach [via the A8 underpass] notes that “the new route from the station offers little visibility of the Centre; minimal signage and wayfaring... lack of continuity of surface textures, [thus] breaking the pedestrian path...” (ibid, p.18).

After such self-criticism one expects the document to come up with solutions, but it merely says “continuity of the covered walkway *could be explored* on our site”; not “*will be implemented*”; and “a Totem-style sign ... *could* [not *will*] greatly aid visibility ..from this key transport node”. Overall, the document gives the impression of a 'work in progress' rather than a submission in support of an application.

The section 'Movement and Permeability', p.25 of the D+A, shows the NW entrance from the underpass, but not the east entrance from South Gyle. The latter is particularly in need of remedy because, not only is the Centre entrance not visible, but one is confronted with seemingly-endless hedges and car parks and there's no signage to indicate one's direction.

The second para of this section speaks of “pedestrian *vehicles*” - whatever they are; the third para has the following: “Addressing this visibility and street presence issue is key to any proposed design concept”. It's gobbledegook.

In 4.5 “improved tram stop links seek to create clearer routes to the Morrisons entrance”, but the drawing gives no indication of how this is to be done; opposite the stop is one of the usual huge hedged car parks; at the north end of the stop is a pedestrian crossing (promising!) but next to that, a “pocket green space” which is “to be improved” (by planting, not by a route!), with no indication of how one gets through it, or indeed whether one has to, as no pedestrian route is shown.

Beyond that, a “tram/railway information point” is located at the far side of another huge car park, well away from either the tram or the railway!

p.63 a montage shows the wide path coming from the underpass, but this is then to be narrowed by a row of bollards to a tiny exit, beyond which the existing path is also to be narrowed and hemmed in by a painted-mesh wall. It makes no sense.

p.64 mentions “*location for cycle storage*” - but no *actual* cycle storage appears on the plans. There's also mention of a “new shared pedestrian-cycle east-west route” in the text, but nothing of it in the plan; likewise a “new widened paved area indicates a direct ped/cycle route from the residential area” - just what we want, but again no sign of it in the plan(s).

In short (I could go on!) there seem to be some good ideas, but they do not appear in the drawings, and the texts are muddled, to say the least.

To summarise:

What cyclists need here are clearly defined routes to the east, the south (to join the main road network), and the west (the underpass). These should be paralleled with pedestrian routes but be segregated as far as possible. Routes, signage and wayfaring need to be greatly improved.

Currently the Gyle Centre is a massive monolith, impeding east-west cycle movement. The Extension would make the deviation distances even greater.

We suggest that some of the car parking on the south side of the centre should be removed, and a pedestrian/cycle 'boulevard', width at least 4m, created in its place. It would run right across the front, from the underpass on the west side, to the start of the cycle path on the NE side.

This would have several advantages:

** It would give some line to a building complex which is currently jagged and un-coordinated;*

** it would create a through route for cyclists, from the airport to the city centre;*

** it would create an area of relative calm and clean air between the car parks and the centre itself, and could be enhanced by planting and possibly outdoor eating places;*

** a southward link to to the tram stop would further co-ordinate the non-vehicular access;*

** there should be only one service entrance across it, which would be carefully controlled so as not to put the lives of pedestrians and cyclists at risk.*

** Item 4 of the D+A Introduction seeks, as a principal aim, “options for bettering the arrival experience, connections to the transport nodes, the entrances, and permeability” (D+A, 01, p.7). Our suggestions fit well with these aspirations; sadly, what the rest of the D+A Statement offers, does not.*

Conclusion

The Government has declared a climate emergency. Far more people could be encouraged to come to this Centre by walking and cycling as well as public transport; car parking could be drastically cut, and the land put to more valuable purposes. Our proposals would make a clear statement of this, and offer the Centre a much more attractive sense of 'place'.

We recommend that permission for these proposals, as they stand, be refused.

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