

Pre-Application Consultation 20/01235/PAN,

New Filmhouse Proposal, Festival Square, Edinburgh

This document is a response to the pre-application consultation¹ for the new Filmhouse proposal in Festival Square, on behalf of Spokes, the Lothian Cycle Campaign.

Overall

Spokes does not object to the proposal overall, indeed it is a statement building in an otherwise drab and sometimes underused square, and Filmhouse is an important element of the city's life. However, we do have two strong reservations in terms of the impact on cyclists, and the need to encourage cycle use, in line with the Council's transport objectives:

1. It must (probably in conjunction with the Council's Active Travel Team) ensure retention and drastic improvement of the (currently unmarked and shared-use) cycle connection along the northern side of the square, which links the Canal/Exchange/West End route with Lothian Road. It should also provide a connection to Morrison Street via the back of the existing Filmhouse.
2. It must create adequate cycle parking for staff and for customers.

We are confident these matters can be addressed and are happy to discuss them with the proposers, but a failure to address them might result in an objection from Spokes to the formal application for planning permission, which obviously we would not wish to do. Further details are provided below.

Cycle Route

The design principles for the development state that:

'The outdoor landscaping must maximise the potential of the public space, be fully accessible, encourage sustainable transport use and create a welcoming and inspiring environment for all.' However, this is not the case at present from a cycling perspective.

There is an existing cycle path that runs through the Exchange development. It is well-signed, but poorly demarcated on the ground as the developers did not follow Spokes' advice on the matter. This emerges into Festival Square and in fact most cyclists who use it cycle across the square to access Lothian Road on the level, there being steps at the Northern End. The Filmhouse Development must ensure that this link is retained and indeed finished in a well-demarcated way as pedestrian traffic in the Square will increase enormously if this development goes ahead. Unmarked shared use would no longer be acceptable or safe.

The importance of this link is increased by the City Centre Transformation proposals which will result in a segregated cycle route along Lothian Road and a

¹ <https://www.filmhousecinema.com/tell-us-what-you-think>

cycle/pedestrian crossing from Festival Square to the Usher Hall. It is essential that the cycle route across the North of the square links to this crossing.

Secondly, a cycle link should be provided from the above Festival Square route, past the back of the existing Filmhouse, via Newport Street to the Semple Street/Morrison Street junction. We understand Morrison Street is currently being redesigned by the Active Travel Team to become walk and cycle-friendly, which we anticipate will include 2-way cycle use throughout. This link will also provide a direct route to the new Filmhouse for those approaching by bike or on foot from Semple Street.

Cycle parking

Filmhouse has a lot of customers who are cyclists. It is common for the cycle racks outside the current Filmhouse to be full to overflowing when it is open in the evening. We note that Filmhouse is anticipating a doubling of clientele in its new venue and therefore believe that the new development should incorporate adequate cycle parking for its clientele. This does not appear to be the case at the moment.

It is important that cycle parking facilities are convenient and well-sited. Ideally therefore they should be at the front of the building, as at present. It may even be possible to incorporate them into the overall design of the building, having the racks at the same angle as the building. However, the important thing is that they are convenient. There are some racks in the corners of the Square that were constructed as part of previous development, are not well-located and in some corners feel rather dingy.

Furthermore, secure bike storage for staff must be provided and well managed.

Minimum required levels of bike parking and storage are laid out in the Council's Edinburgh Design Guidance² standards, and no relaxations should be granted given the ideal location.

The developers should also provide a travel plan which explains how they will encourage staff and customers to travel to and from Filmhouse by bike and/or other sustainable means. No customer car parking should be necessary for the able-bodied.

We appreciate that the current design is at an early stage and that there is plenty of scope for modifications. We look forward to positive discussions on these aspects.

Simon Watkins
For Spokes
April 2020

² <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/local-development-plan-guidance/edinburgh-design-guidance?documentId=12559&categoryId=20069>