



Edinburgh Planning Guidance: Developer Contributions for Public Realm – Draft for Consultation Submission from Transform Scotland

Monday 17th May 2010

1 Introduction

- 1.1 We welcome The City of Edinburgh Council's proposals that developers contribute to public realm enhancements. We all benefit from an attractive and welcoming public realm, not least developers of commercial and residential property.
- 1.2 Many people visit continental Europe and admire the vibrant town and city centres, high quality public realm and variety of small shops. With this in mind we believe that it is appropriate to call additionally for significant contributions from the major supermarket chains who have blanketed our towns and cities with out-of-town developments.
- 1.3 These developments have caused enormous damage to our traditional high streets and we can all see the impact. Rows of empty shops, deserted and unsafe shopping areas, general loss of local community amenities and large volumes of additional car traffic on the roads are a direct consequence of the developments carried out by the major supermarket chains. We feel it is clearly time to call a complete halt to any further such developments because it seems bizarre that we are now having to spend many millions of pounds of public money in regeneration schemes.
- 1.4 In addition to developer contributions, this might also be a good time to introduce a visitor tax, as is common throughout Europe, the income from which could also be ring-fenced for public realm improvements.

2 Response to Consultation Issues - General points

- 2.1 A part of the key to evaluating this document is objective 5 of the strategy - "to achieve excellence by following and sharing best practice." The strategy makes it clear that satisfactory public realm improvements involve the developer/client, the council/government and the neighbourhood/community. Transform Scotland agrees that participation of all three in agreeing the design is important.
- 2.2 This takes us back to objective 4 - "to develop an approach to public realm funding". This points out the various methods which have been used in the past and highlights the *ad hoc* nature of much of this funding. This document attempts to rationalise funding in the future by setting out a standard scheme and table of tariffs but which is still capable of being modified to suit particular circumstances. The note to the committee on objective 4 said "It was recognised by respondents that there is currently a significant shortage in funding for public realm works. However, the private sector, and in particular developers, expressed concerns regarding the Council's proposal to consider a public realm developer contribution." It did not specify further what are the concerns were. It is probably fair to guess that one may be simply that the developers were being asked to provide more money, but another one may be that the present system is unfair - in some cases developers are expected to make contributions, but other ones are not. If this is one of the concerns, and we would suggest it is a valid one, then the present document satisfactorily addresses this in laying out a standard scheme.

3 Response to Consultation Issues - Specific points

- 3.1 **3.2-9:** While there might need to be some kind of prioritisation, we think it is misleading and confusing to make the proposal for developer contribution **only** for developments within the city centre. There are three arguments for this:
- 1.If there is a principle of developer contribution, it should apply anywhere within the city*
 - 2.Charging only within the central area might deter developers from using that area and drive them to the outskirts.*
 - 3.There are many other parts of the city that are in need of regeneration that are not immediately within the city centre area and need a face-lift to make them more attractive for visitors, residents and shop-keepers alike and that would benefit from an injection of public funds.*
- 3.2 **3.10:** The "tapering" of the scale of contributions at both the small development and large development ends of the spectrum seems fair and appropriate. What may be a problem is the situation where one site or street is being subject to a series of small developments. In this case there would be no financial contribution, would there still be involvement by these developments in the public realm element? It seems to have been the case in the past that very often things such as pedestrian and cycle routes and pathways in this kind of development have been neglected. Appendix 1 5.Special Circumstances. A does seem to address this issue.
- 3.3 **3.17:** suggests that "In the event of a contribution not being used within a fixed period (10 years) of the date the contribution was made, it will be returned to the developer in full, with interest." Transform Scotland believes that this introduces an unnecessary complication that could lead to endless debates with developers. Our preference is for the contributions to go into a 'Common Good'-type fund and used as and where appropriate.
- 3.4 We suggest that consideration be given to setting up a 'Common Good'-type fund into which developer contributions would be funnelled and ring-fenced. The money could then be used to refurbish shops and facades in streets such as Dalry Road, Gorgie Road, Easter Road etc, which are close to the city centre and much in need of regeneration. They are also areas that visitors must walk along either from the city centre or when accessing from outside and the present appearance presents a very poor image of the city. Such a scheme is also likely to be popular with Edinburgh residents, who would see the money being spend in a way that would enhance their own experience of living in the city.
- 3.5 **3.21,** to answer the specific questions:
- 1.The principle: Yes, provided it is seen to be fair and reasonable.*
 - 2.Central area: No, it should be citywide.*
 - 3.The level of contribution: Yes, although presumably it should be subject to inflation or some timescale added (i.e. presumably it is not intended that this should be the rate for all eternity).*

4 Summary

- 4.1 Transform Scotland agrees with the principle of developer contributions but feels that the scheme should be city-wide and not confirmed to the central area.
- 4.2 Planning issues need to be addressed so that the development of out-of-town retail is discouraged because of their detrimental effect on city centre shops and the public realm in general.
- 4.3 Consideration should be given to the introduction of a 'Common Good'-type fund into which contributions would be channelled. The money in this fund could then be used to enhance the public realm in other parts of the city, for example, by assisting in the refurbishment of small shop fronts in the Dalry/Easter Road/ London Road areas.

- 4.4 The CEC should provide, and enforce, standards to be met by developers in relation to the provision of walkways and cycle ways, integrated, or capable of integration, with others in surrounding areas. This would not also enhance the public realm but would also assist in the gradual development of a city-wide cycle network and would lead to increased levels of walking and cycling by commuters and schoolchildren. This, in turn, would help reduce car use and help towards meeting national carbon dioxide reduction targets.
- 4.5 Consideration should be given to the introduction of a visitor tax (e.g. £0.50/room/day levied from hotels) to provide further money for public realm enhancements. This is common practice throughout much of Europe, and we gather is already under active consideration by CEC.

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Transform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation groups; consultancies; and local transport campaigns.

Transform Scotland
5 Rose Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2PR
t: 0131 243 2690

e: <info@transformscotland.org.uk>
w: <www.transformscotland.org.uk>