

Edinburgh is a three-dimensional dynamo of a place, formed by time and violent geology, with its volcanic outcrops scoured by ice sheets and then built on, up, down, through and across with extraordinary vigour and to a set of enlightened and contrasting masterplans whose intellectual clarity and effectiveness still shine. The culture and vigour of its people is intricately linked to this physical place and we, representing the city's architects, believe that a clear vision for the city of 2050 requires a new, enlightened masterplan that weaves together place, people and their lives – a new paradigm to deliver the “connected, inspired, fair and thriving city” that will suit the wellbeing (the health, wealth and happiness) of all future Edinburgh residents, as well as contributing to the enhancement of the local, national and global environment.

We set out, first, the **7 Outstanding Values** we see as being constant, and positive, through the evolution of and changes to Edinburgh, and which need to be understood, respected and built-upon to secure its fruitful future development. Then we state the **10 “Steps to Edinburgh 2050”** that we suggest will deliver the city we aspire to.

Edinburgh's Outstanding Values:

- 1. Enlightened Evolution:** evolution proceeds incrementally, with occasional leaps – paradigm shifts. Edinburgh's were unusually clear, from the Mercat of David the First's Old Town plan, through the Rational New, the Civic and Commercial Victorian City and the modernist Open City. We lack a clear understanding of what paradigm might guide us now.
- 2. Landscape Embraced:** we have made wonderfully-creative use of our diverse geology, building on our slopes in ways that bring maximum human and commercial activity to our streets, making gardens in our low areas and parks of our hills and, most recently, converting our river and canal into green infrastructure.
- 3. Dense and Green:** The Old Town tenement tradition has generated a city that is, in British terms, very dense, bringing the benefits of close services, social interaction and creative urban intensity. Our vigorous landscape, with parks and gardens occupying its hills and troughs, means that we are also, paradoxically, not only dense but, generally, extremely well provided for green space – though not always specifically, there being much work to do to provide for all the city.

4. **Integrative:** the slopes and cliff-like tenements of The Old Town, with their closes down to cellars, and fore-stairs up to grand apartments, also generated an extraordinary level of social interaction, with homes for all classes piled on top of each other; while the New Town retained mixed homes in adjacent streets, in contrast to the single-class use of whole districts in expanded cities elsewhere. At our best we have a continuing tradition of contrasting communities jostling next to each other and there remains a significant, mixed residential population in Edinburgh's lovely centre; though there are also huge levels of inequality across the city, and a need to fortify the residential population that enlivens its centre.
5. **Creative Spaces:** from the mercats, courts and closes of The Old Town and salons of the New, whose mixing and meeting nurtured the Enlightenment, to the way the Festivals occupy the city (including many of these historic places) and our new craftspeople and entrepreneurs occupy old buildings for new creative arts, crafts and tech businesses, the city has always nurtured creativity.
6. **City and Villages:** Edinburgh has a clear, central structure and value, which contains and embraces a rich diversity of local areas – city villages – from seaside towns and ports to inner-city traditional or bohemian communities and couthy suburbs.
7. **Extremes and Contrasts:** from the great open markets of the mediaeval High Street to its dark, narrow closes – the city of Jekyll and Hyde – and the massivity of a Georgian block against the delicacy of its internal decoration, or the intricate crafted timber roofs of both old and new Parliament Halls against their stone and concrete exteriors.

Steps to Edinburgh 2050 (including notes on their Outcomes)

1.0 Connecting Scotland; Facing the World

- 1.1 Trains: Edinburgh as a hub in a much-improved nationalised rail network allowing swift and green connections to all the nation's centres (including cross-border to Carlisle and a recovered direct link north to Perth). In particular the opportunity for a very fast train ("bullet", or alternative embracing new technology) to link Edinburgh and Glasgow (it might be called the Central Belter) allowing these two very different cities to complement each other's strengths.

- 1.2 Planes: a primary international hub airport between these two contrasting cities, with the train taking 15 minutes into each, provides the perfect Gateway into this small nation and connection out of it.
- 1.3 Outcome: outstanding national clarity and openness.

2.0 Growing the City: Infill and Intensification

We welcome the fact that people want to come to live in Edinburgh and contribute to its future. In order to respect the Values we have set-out, of density, intensity and greenness, we must first grow the city within its boundaries, bringing activity and wealth to our existing communities (and noting most of our brownfield sites invite investment into our poorer areas) before spreading out beyond the current city limits – and avoiding, at all times, the sprawl that is characteristic of new housing. To do this, we need better legislative leverage to ensure the development of vacant brownfield sites, and a more imaginative approach to designating sites for housing growth:

- 2.1 Compulsory Sales Orders: alongside Compulsory Purchase powers, Sales Orders would enable our Local Authority to force the market sale and development of brownfield sites that have been land-banked to await a rise in land value.
- 2.2 Transport Infrastructure (see 4.0 below): would raise the value and dense developability of stalled sites.
- 2.3 Residential Designations: a far pushier view of areas within the city which could convert to dense residential: warehouses, low-rise shopping malls and even green space – Edinburgh has much green space within its boundaries but not all is of the best quality, and there are fields that could be imaginatively developed without threatening our “Dense and Green” value.
- 2.4 Planning Rules revised: existing hidden levers, which cause greenfield sprawl to happen before city infill, to be revised: principally the *5-year supply rule*, which allows land-speculation to force release of new sites; and the rules governing “*Housing Needs and Demand Assessments*”, to ensure that city-edge sites are only released once infill sites are exhausted.
- 2.5 Harvesting Infrastructure Funding – money to invest in the schools, parks, surgeries, transport links and general services we need to support new communities that these communities will require: designating new areas for housing, or announcing new transport links (tram or train lines) hugely raises the value of land, bringing windfalls to the businessmen and farmers who own it. These rises often lead to a scrabble to then

fund infrastructure; but if national legislation (principally the Land Compensation Act) was changed to allow re-designated or newly-connected land to be acquired at existing – usually industrial or agricultural – values, our Local Authority could invest that rise straight back into good-quality infrastructure, greatly increasing the flow of good-quality, well-connected new homes.

(This is a primary issue we need to be clear about: if Edinburgh grows, do we want the riches this unlocks to go to our citizens suffering inequality and fund the growth of our services and infrastructure, or be pocketed by those who profit from land speculation? And we should note that this method is an Edinburgh tradition, creatively used in the development of the New Town.)

2.6 Outcome: see 3.4

3.0 Growing the City: outwith its Boundaries

- 3.1 Expansion: we believe that development within the existing boundaries of Edinburgh – the “Infill and Intensification” above – has huge capacity to grow the city; and that expansion should not be commenced until that capacity is nearly full. If further growth, that expands the boundary, is necessary, the following should apply:
- 3.2 Growth: should be in fingers, or corridors, with green wedges between, and be based around transport links, with new communities having proper, dense centres that have balanced mixed-uses and services around transport stops.
- 3.3 Harvesting Infrastructure Funding: re-designating land for such new communities should generate infrastructure funding by existing-use compensation, as at 2.5.
- 3.4 Combined Outcome (2 and 3): a Plan for Growth, that intensifies before it spreads.

4.0 Connecting and Sharing

- 4.1 Trams: an efficient, accessible transport infrastructure is a powerful tool to address inequality, spreading wealth from the heart of Edinburgh out to its less fortunate communities and allowing these communities access to the centre, and that wealth. The well-documented disasters of the first tram-line – including that it is a greenbelt-buster, creating wealth for the already-wealthy around RBS and the Airport, needs to be redeemed by the tram’s extension and expansion (under proper contractual procedures and fully-designed, with lessons learned) to the city communities it should have prioritised: a loop down to Leith, then west along the struggling communities of

North Edinburgh and back in; a loop out Dalkeith Road that then loops back in, whether through Straiton to the west or Portobello to the east. More loops should follow including, and especially, the reopening of the Southern Suburban Loop, stitched-into the Tram network and linking the wealth of the centre and southern suburbs to areas of need like Craigmillar and Niddrie.

- 4.2 Busses: Edinburgh's exemplary bus company to remain in public ownership, with innovation to come in pricing and routing.
- 4.3 Cycles: the continuing and imaginative expansion of cycle provision and dedicated cycleways – including, for instance, cycleways alongside new tram tracks.
- 4.4 Green Links: stitching together Edinburgh's green spaces wherever possible, out the green wedges and including the connecting of East and West Princes Street Gardens.
- 4.5 Loops: the general efficacy of a loop, instead of dead ends, applies to all routes in Edinburgh – for instance the sleepy west ends of Princes Street and the Grassmarket/Kings Stables Road would be greatly enhanced by joining their dead ends together via an imaginative commercial development at the Castle Terrace car park, that incorporates a proper, protected Farmers' Market, offering healthy, locally-grown food.
- 4.6 Macro to Micro: not forgetting the many new or recovered links possible to open-out the city to pedestrian access.
- 4.6 Digital: access for all to the digital infrastructure of the city.
- 4.7 Outcome: physical and social mobility.

5.0 Ecological Balance: in transport and the built environment

- 5.1 Public Transport: an exemplary, integrated, publicly-owned system, as set-out in 4.0 above.
- 5.2 Private Transport: *car-free by 2033!* Edinburgh's near-future should be a huge expansion of car clubs, followed by car club driverless electric taxis, available for all, with larger hires for occasional and holiday use at the city edges.
- 5.3 Old Buildings: the virtues of good maintenance, repair and reuse of our existing fabric respected and advanced – simple low-carbon sustainability in the built environment, which also brings more jobs (especially for small and local builders and consultants) per £ invested than the big corporate land-clearance schemes. And, at a national level,

VAT levelled across construction instead of the absurd and damaging current situation, where the repair of homes attracts 20%, and the demolition and the construction of new homes is zero-rated.

- 5.4 Our Heritage: the understanding that the Outstanding Values we have been bequeathed are not just some postcard backdrop but at the core of our inherited wealth, as a city and a culture, leading to their positive repair and reuse as a living resource.
- 5.5 Energy: promotion of energy efficiency options and of renewable energy supplies, with our city government, schools and services taking a leadership role.
- 5.6: Environment and Resources: promotion of sustainable solutions for water, wastes and other natural resources, and leadership in green procurement and management.
- 5.5 Outcome: a carbon-neutral Edinburgh.

6.0 The Public Realm

- 6.1 The Centre: the Old and New Towns reconfigured as pedestrian-centred places, with The Old Town's Mercats returned to trade and bustle and The New Town's great, calm boulevards rescued from traffic, for people. Train and tram interchanges, busses to edges and very frequent connecting electric services within the centre.
- 6.2 Village Centres: each village of Edinburgh with its own, calm, pedestrian-centred heart.
- 6.3 New Communities: centred on new village centres.
- 6.4 Outcome: the city for its people, first, not its traffic.

7.0 New Buildings to be Proud of: Edinburgh has a historic continuum of great architecture, not only in the beauty and high quality of its jewels and monuments but in the craftsmanship, utility and soundness of the ordinary historic buildings of the city. Our recent architecture fails to live up to this standard and we have been left aiming for a mediocrity that is slightly traditional, slightly modern, slightly sustainable and slightly urban, miserably ticking all boxes and falling between all stools. The reasons for this are wider societal ones, but some of them can be mitigated by the following:

- 7.1 Competitions: the city should encourage and lead competitions for significant sites, setting-out a process which attracts open, simple applications which are whittled

down to a few invited entries who are then paid for their developed design. Juries that include representatives from the community, amenity bodies, Chamber of Commerce and other business people would then choose a winner which might be more surprising, beautiful, innovative and joyful and – thus validated – find a happier way through Edinburgh’s standard, joy-sapping community v. business Planning Permission stand-off.

- 7.2 Architects and Builders: current “procurement” practices favour large, corporate practices favouring careless, repetitive solutions. Positively target SMEs, with local passion and imagination, with the “Preston Model” using EU legislation to require local sourcing of consultant services for everyday projects.
- 7.3 Collective Self-Build: used on 50% of new housing on the Continent, this method is cheaper (eliminating one borrowing charge) and has ordinary people leading the design of their homes and communities, uniting to buy a site and commission a shared development. With good architects serving them this could produce fresh and thoughtful results.
- 7.4 Outcome: better new buildings and urban spaces.

8.0 A City for All:

- 8.1 A City for Children: a general focus on noise and traffic reductions and the safety and health of young people, including nursery provision throughout the city that brings the benefits of early learning to all.
- 8.2 Family Living in the City: models that promote density with the amenity that families need: homes with gardens (note the old “Colonies” model), shared spaces to play and village greens.
- 8.3 Old People in their Communities: shared, sheltered homes with support, throughout the city, allowing old people to seek new friendships within their communities while releasing big family homes for others.
- 8.4 New Co-operative ways of Living: co-housing and other co-operative forms encouraged, with sites made available.
- 8.5 Our Visitors: tourists to the city encouraged but taxed, to contribute to the maintenance and extension of the city’s cultural offer that they benefit from.

- 8.6 Our Creatives: good spaces for tech, science, green business, culture and other start-ups to move into and onto – creative, shared, flexible and low-energy, as opposed to the dull, zipped-up corporate glitz the market provides.
- 8.7 Active Communities: the proper working of the bottom-up culture that Community Empowerment envisages, with asset transfers and active communities devising and running their own local programmes.
- 8.8 Cultural Renewal: the above Creatives and Communities overlap where the city’s small arts organisations have reinvigorated areas like our literary heritage, or dance provision, and such initiatives need strengthened and spread.
- 8.9 A National Investment Bank: a central, national resource to use money borrowed at low Government rates, instead of the Private Finance Initiatives which have beggared us, to work with the Local Authority to invest in the public housing and social infrastructure we require.
- 8.10 Outcome: investment in true, mixed, well-served communities.

9.0 Our Democratic Structure

- 9.1 The City Region: it benefits both cities and their hinterlands to work together. Scotland needs to plan around larger, city region Local Authorities in its most populated areas, with Edinburgh and the Lothians united.
- 9.2 Leadership: an innovative Council, focussed on using all local and national levers to improve the city for and with its citizens.
- 9.4 Our Communities: as the Local Authority grows, so we must give ourselves the local structure that assists belonging (and is prevalent in the rest of Europe), with community/parish/whatever Councils introduced, with the concept of subsidiarity devolving roles, responsibilities and finance down to them.
- 9.5 Outcome: ownership and leadership.

10.0 The 2050 Edinburgh Paradigm: The City of Wellbeing

If our talk of “making Edinburgh the best city in the world to live in by 2050” has any chance of succeeding, we have to understand what this means, and what might lead us there.

Recognising the different paradigms our Edinburgh has evolved through, we should examine what is making a positive difference today and properly enshrine it. Subtle changes from the Edinburgh of my youth are examples that add up to something of significance:

- . I've had a lovely cycle to work, through a park, arriving there refreshed and creative, as opposed to my Father's frustrating commute into town;
- . the Water of Leith of my youth, that I remember as a reeking industrial sewer, is a beautiful green thread stitching from hills to port;
- . the Wester Hailes I worked in as a young community architect is, with the Union Canal re-dug through it, no longer a place to by-pass but connected – on the way somewhere, rather than avoided;
- . that I had a reasonable expectation – unlike my parents – that when I sent my kids to play in their local park they would not return with shoes covered in dog dirt;
- . and that, as my Mother observes of this century's Edinburgh: "the bus drivers are nicer", while noting that "... they are the most important people in the town as they spread their good humour all around".

And my neighbourhood benefits from some old Edinburgh positives, in having a working High Street, parks and transport, supportive community and excellent local schools for my kids. In this I am fortunate, but these are benefits that should be available to every one of Edinburgh's citizens.

This is the [City of Wellbeing](#), and pursuing it as our now and future paradigm gives us a way of ascribing value to action that guide our choices more surely and usefully than our current, broken models.

Malcolm Fraser, Architect