

# A NEW PUBLIC SPACE AT KELVINBRIDGE

This report identifies a public open space that would be of great benefit during Covid-19 as an interim and experimental scheme. Proposals for an interim use of the North Woodside Road cul-de-sac in front of Websters Theatre were submitted to the City Services team in September and these are developed in this short report.

Websters Theatre is situated in the former Lansdowne Church at the junction of Great Western Road and North Woodside Road. North Woodside Road terminates behind the footway on Great Western Road at the eastern end of the bridge over the River Kelvin.

The Category 'A' listed landmark building has been converted into a theatre by the charity Fact Three which runs the building and its associated arts programme as a community enterprise.

There are a number of short term benefits that would be obtained during Covid-19 if the road immediately in front of the the main west entrance could be pedestrianised and the turning area moved 20 - 25 metres to the north during the pandemic as we move into 2021 and hopefully see a reduction in tier levels in Glasgow.

This public space has potential to become a significant asset within the St George's Cross/Great Western Road Local Town Centre contributing to physical, social and emotional wellbeing.



## Immediate Benefits for the Public Realm

- A pleasant south facing public space would be created above the River Kelvin using existing surfaces, with public use for events and during festivals.
- The area would be used by pedestrians and cyclists and defined by planters along the northern boundary, punctuating one of the many attractions to be found along the Kelvin Walkway corridor.
- The scheme would support the recovery of Websters Theatre programme in the event that social distancing continues well into 2021.
- The existing socially distanced outside seating around the theatre would be extended to occupy the square for six months in the summer in a continental fashion with a small performance stage directly opposite the entrance.
- Pedestrianisation of the area would complement the landmark building and enable theatre audiences to assemble, socially distanced, before entering for performances.



- The scheme would focus the need to improve the street furniture and lighting at a point on Great Western Road which is presently of poor visual quality, dark at night and under-used apart from refuse collection in the south west corner. \
- The space is extremely well served by public transport and close to walkways and cycle routes. Kelvinbridge subway is across Great Western Road and there are bus lay-bys near Websters Theatre.
- If the temporary use of this space is successful it could lead to a more formal proposal being put out to further public consultation and progressed through a public realm improvement similar in scale to that at Vinicombe Street on Byres Road which has been a successful scheme.
- Six car parking bays would be suspended for the 6 month period between from 1st April 2021 until 30th September 2021. From a visual survey of car parking in the area at 6pm Sunday 15th November 2020 some 50% of available bays were in use by residents. The temporary loss of six bays should not result in hardship for local residents as it supports active travel and public transport.
- By providing a public space at the eastern termination of a famous bridge in Glasgow something of real townscape value could be created instead of a waste collection facility. Together with the adjacent theatre the new public space will act as a destination on the eastern end of the bridge bringing trade to businesses along Great Western Road between Kelvinbridge and St Georges Cross, a designated Local Town Centre that may well struggle to survive the current pandemic.



## Long Term Benefits for the Public Realm

The quality of the public realm is an important consideration in the City Plan vision for Glasgow as a world class city. Kelvin Bridge is a dramatic and exciting feature with the River Kelvin below bringing the natural environment right into the heart of the city. The bridge is anchored at one end by Caledonian Mansions and at the other by the former Lansdowne Church. Along with Glasgow Academy and St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Kelvinbridge reveals one of the City's most impressive of historic townscapes.

However, as a setting to the landmark building the end of North Woodside Road is currently a forlorn left-over feature from a period in time when side roads were severed from the main thoroughfare in an effort to increase east west traffic flows. Redundant as part of the road network, the old carriageway now suffers from frequently blocked drains, poor lighting and serves principally as a location for wheelie bins and for non-local parking.



North Woodside Road serves as a main pedestrian and cyclist route to Maryhill. North Woodside Road links Kelvinbridge subway station to Community Central Hall and Queens Cross Church and generally serves the residential areas to the north for pedestrians using public transport on Great Western Road.

While they are on the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, the Firhill and Woodside communities have great character and heritage interest and the present condition of this gateway to Firhill and Maryhill leaves much to be desired. This improvement would contribute to the quality of life for these communities.

An opportunity exists here to create a public event space increasing outdoor vibrancy particularly during festivals and for community events. This could take the form of a new public square in front of the magnificent west elevation of the church building. This will be an improvement that will preserve and enhance the character of Glasgow West Conservation Area.

The location of the proposed square could not be more strategic in planning terms. It is at the intersection of the River Kelvin with its Walkway, Great Western Road and the Glasgow Subway.

A public space at this end of the bridge over the Kelvin in front of a fine public building would be a link in the chain of high quality tourism features that span the River Kelvin Walkway from the Clyde all the way to the Botanic Gardens and beyond. A chance for visitors and local people using the river for recreation to pause and enjoy the ambience of the St George's Cross/Great Western Road Local Town Centre facilities.



Websters - A Vibrant Location in Summer 2019

## Websters Arts Programme Recovery

Since opening in 2013 Websters Theatre and Websters Playhouse in the adjacent former hall have become popular performance spaces. A busy programme had been planned for 2020. In 2019 there had been 140 performances. These comprised stage plays, music, dance, comedy and pantomime as well as theatre and music school bookings at various points in the year bringing many young people into the building to learn, rehearse and perform.

As can be seen from the list below the theatre is well used by schools and colleges. As well as many individual acts booking the two venues, notable organisations that stage events at Websters are listed below and can be expected to return and use both the venue and the proposed outside space under social distancing guidelines in 2021.

The pedestrianised space in front of the theatre would remain part of the public realm and Fact Three would be obliged to obtain consents for use of the space by its theatre clients in line with normal procedures.

### Companies that perform at Websters

Ann Lochran	LA Stage School
Arts Enigma	MGA Academy
BBC Breaking the News	Music is Live
Bickering Theatre	New College Lanarkshire
Bluecake Productions	Pantheon Theatre
Captivate Theatre	Otago Theatre
Dance School of Scotland	Our Time Theatre Group
Clyde College	Paisley Music and Opera Society
Dark Start Academy	Partick Thistle Football Supporters
Elysian Theatre Group	Pint Size
Fallen Angels Club	Plutot la Vie
Foundation Scotland	PM Music
Geez a Break Productions	Rebel Cow
Giffnock Theatre Players	Shatter Perceptions
Gilded Balloon	Shows on a Shoestring
Glasgow Clyde College	Stellar Musical Theatre
Glasgow Comedy Festival	Student Theatre at Glasgow
Glasgow Live Productions	Sweets for Addicts
Go Kids Scotland	The Lyric Club
Green Door Theatre	The Performance Academy
Half Wits Theatre Company	Theatre Broad
Ignite Theatre	Tram Direct
Insideout Productions	Vivace Theatre and Music School
Jazzart UK	West College Scotland

It should be noted that the stage and associated performance outdoors will only be possible when the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted sufficiently to permit such activity.

The proposal assumes that outdoor events will carry less risk than indoor events and might therefore be permitted sooner.

If successful an application will be made to Creative Scotland Open Fund to fund a regular Saturday programme over the summer months.

Websters Theatre will supply the staff, box office and stewarding to enable outside performances to take place with controlled numbers while maintaining a through route for pedestrians and cyclists as illustrated below.

The management of the space will be in accordance with the City Councils guidance and requirements.

This will be an important opportunity for the creative sector to start to function again after so many artists, theatre personnel and companies have had their activities and in many cases livelihoods suspended.

