Consultation Process on the Grassmarket Improvement Scheme. Edinburgh. UK

The Grassmarket Improvement Scheme brought together a range of stakeholders to ensure that the development of the site met the required needs of each group.

Background & Objectives

The Grassmarket is the largest open space in Edinburgh’s Old Town and an important focal point. Rising traffic levels and parked cars had led to decline in the quality of the space, exacerbated by anti-social behaviour associated with the night time economy. This was a detriment to the daytime economy which is home to different members of the community. The City of Edinburgh Council sought to correct this problem; not willing for the Grassmarket to become an area for anti-social behaviour, but an area which promoted community activities and helped local businesses prosper. A long and thorough consultation process took place to ensure that the needs of local communities and businesses were heard and included in the Grassmarket Improvement Project.
Implementation

At an early stage of the project, it was recognised that the different communities (businesses, residents and traders) in the area were diverse and demanding, and that active and effective community involvement would be essential to the success of the scheme. At one meeting, a participant from the local community stated that the project would 'be successful if you pleased most of the people, most of the time'. This became a test against which the project was continuously measured. A series of public meetings were held in order to engage the local community along with local stakeholders in the design process. This culminated in a community planning weekend that was held in the area. The community planning weekend generated a series of design concepts from which design principles evolved. A range of difficult issues relating to late night drinking and anti-social behaviour were among the priorities for the community and a parallel Stakeholders Group (made up of representatives of the local resident, trader and business community) was established to carry forward those concerns that the public realm project may not resolve. The Grassmarket Forum was formed to operate following completion of the works. As a follow up to the community planning weekend, a public meeting was held where the design principles and a design concept were tabled and supported by those present. This formed the basis of the detailed designs that were developed. The design principles were agreed by the client group and also ensured that the range of concerns expressed by the local residential and business communities have been included. The main contributors in the consultation process were: The City of Edinburgh Council was the main client and co-funder of the project. A range of departments within the Council were involved in the implementation of the project including Planning, Transport, Archaeology and Event Management. Scottish Enterprise is Scotland's main economic, enterprise, innovation and investment agency. Scottish Enterprise was a co-funder of the project and provided input on economic regeneration. The Edinburgh World Heritage Trust was a co-funder in their role of conserving, protecting and promoting the city's World Heritage Site. The Trust also provided input on historic interpretation. Historic Scotland provided heritage advice in terms of ensuring that the historic and architectural character of the area was maintained and enhanced. The cost of the scheme was budgeted for £5.3 million and was completed in the 2009.

Conclusions

The Grassmarket project recovers many original qualities of space that had been lost due to the increased intervention of traffic over the years. The redistribution of space from vehicles to the pedestrian allows flexible use for events such as markets, film shows, dance events and concert performances. An assessment of the events programme has also been carried out. This indicates that events have created a positive benefit for three quarters of the businesses in the Grassmarket, generating an estimated net additional expenditure of £193,000.

Keywords
stakeholder involvement
street layout / design