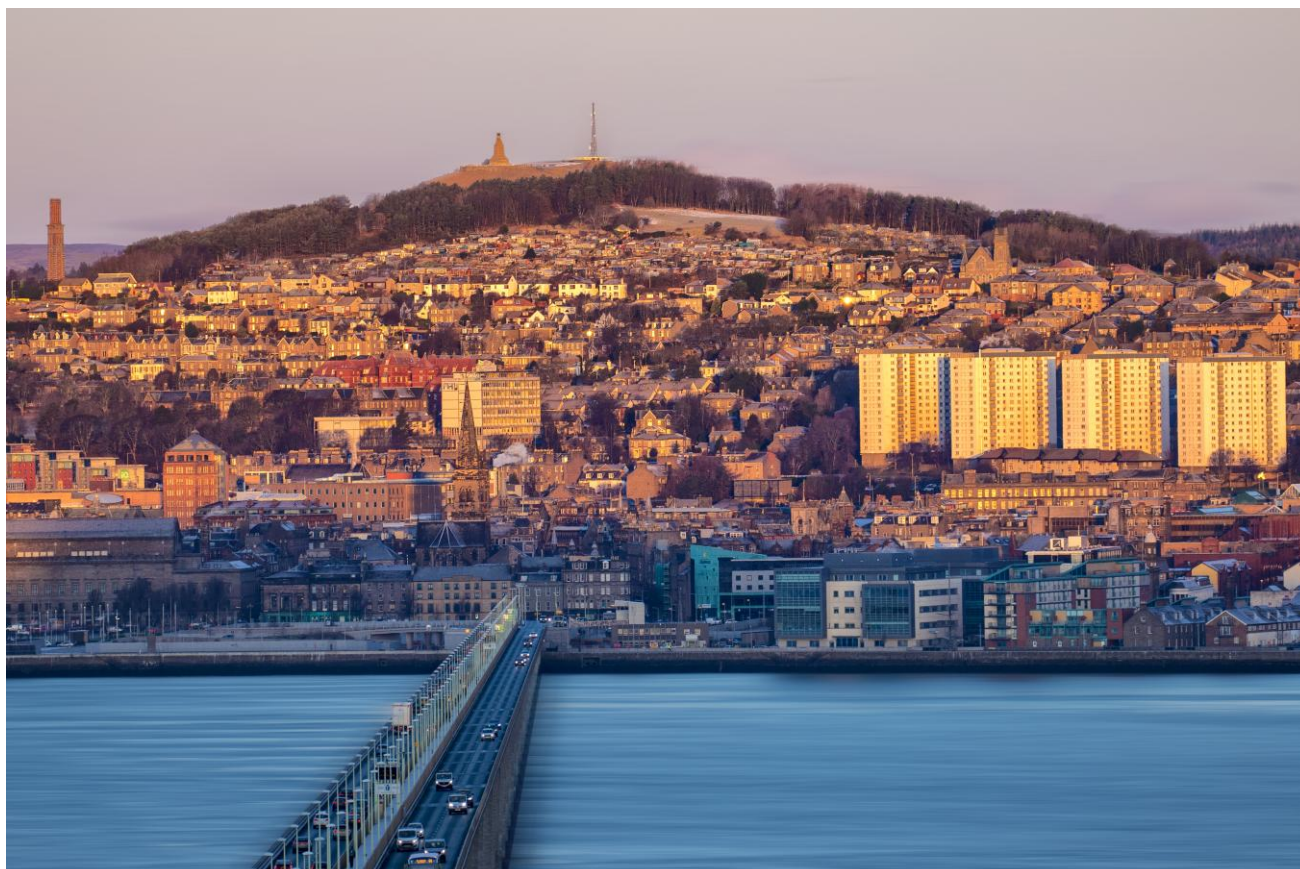


Pocket Places for People



Context

Albert Street is the local centre for Dundee's Stobswell neighbourhood. It is home to several independent and long-standing retailers who serve the local community. A high proportion of ethnic minorities and older people live in high density tenements in the streets adjacent to Albert Street.

The road is a major transport corridor into the city; therefore, it experiences significant traffic and parking demand. Several of the side streets had previously been closed to traffic at Albert Street which created a continuous footway along the main road, improving road safety and preventing rat running.

Some limited planting and seating had been provided alongside these modal filters but the redundant road space they created was mainly taken up by parked cars. Dundee City Council started to think about how it could use its district centre fund to make these spaces, and other junctions in the vicinity, work better for the residents, not least since many of the tenements don't have their own outside space.



What Happened

In partnership with Sustrans and the Stobswell Forum, a local community charity, a consultation period began. During this, temporary planters (made of durable and easy to procure concrete piping, painted by a local artist) were placed at the closed end of Craigie Street, to get residents thinking about the road space which could be converted and how it might be altered to revitalise areas around dull, grey tenement buildings.

Ultimately, five neighbourhood locations benefitted from permanent streetscape changes: Arthurstone Terrace, Balmore Street, Craigie Street, Langlands Street and Park Avenue. At each location, space has been reclaimed from parked or moving vehicles, in the process improving road safety and creating pockets of pedestrian-friendly spaces for people to move through or spend time in. The changes have included:

- Injecting colour with trees and planting, murals, painted pavements and light projectors.
- Providing seats, bins and cycle parking to make more useable spaces for pedestrians and cyclists transferring to foot.
- Putting in raised tables, buildouts and continuous footways at three side roads to slow turning traffic and improve the visibility of vulnerable road users, while also creating space for planting and seating.
- Designing all planted areas as rain gardens (where rainwater run-off is channelled directly into the soil).

At Craigie Street, the dead end created by the existing modal filter has been turned into a pocket park, which is Dundee's first large-scale rain garden. A 30,000-litre storage tank beneath is fed by run-off and downpipes from the surrounding buildings. The tank is emptied slowly back into the city's drainage system. It provides flood defences sufficient for a '1 in 1,000-year storm' and will help to protect the city centre downhill from extreme weather events brought on by climate change.

Above-ground improvements at Craigie Street include trees and planting, high quality seating and tables suitable for wheelchair users, a mural and community notice board, and resurfacing to provide a continuous walkway across what was the old road surface. This surface is made of loose blockwork, which provides gaps for drainage, and has been laid to create patterns which tie into a pre-existing mural on the gable end of an adjacent building.

Areas of Collaboration

The project was led by a Dundee City Council planning officer and delivered in partnership with Sustrans Scotland, the Stobswell Forum community group, and Scottish Water.



Overall Result

Locally, a significant impact of the Albert Street improvements has been on community empowerment and participation, engendering a belief that positive change is achievable. This has been reinforced by the prestige of the scheme, which has won, and been shortlisted for, several national awards.

The reduction in graffiti and vandalism in any of the new spaces suggests that the community is proud of its new assets, and it is certainly making use of them. For example, pupils from the secondary school at the top of Albert Street now spend money in the takeaways at the bottom of the street and then use the newly created spaces to socialise.

The rain gardens were the first such installations in Dundee. These continue to be monitored by the University of Abertay and Scottish Water both for the suitability of the planting and performance of the rainwater management system to inform future installations.

Lessons Learned

Successes

- The local community has since led projects to install four more murals in the Stobswell area, using street art to create vibrancy and a greater sense of place. It is working with the council to create another pocket park in nearby Eliza Street, where the Stobswell Forum (supported by the local housing association) has opened a previously vacant shop. This space serves as a much-needed community hub, where residents can drop in and get support and advice.
- The team effort means there is now better signage and wayfinding links to benefit those living, working and travelling through the district.
- Residents and visitors can now enjoy multiple murals on shop shutters which addresses the poor appearance of those shutters when closed. A coordinated mural of suffragette Ethel Moorhead by Alloa artist Michael Corr, together with a ground mural by a Dundee artist has significantly increased the brightness and positive appearance of Langlands Street, serving to reduce the intimidating dark environment of this narrow pend and reducing the fear of crime. A bespoke bin store which also contains an artistic design helps reduce litter in the street and makes the bin area a positive feature.
- Painted paving, a new bench made from climate-friendly materials and cycle parking have also been installed on the busy route.
- Accessibility for those using the informal crossings on these streets as well as Park Avenue has been improved by the installation of tactile surfaces.

Challenges

- A Town Centre Health Check was completed for Albert Street before the pandemic. There have not been sufficient resources available to repeat this health check since the works were completed.



- The planting of the raingardens has been challenging to maintain, with significant plant failure early in the scheme. This has led to a reconsideration of plants to be used in such areas in future and the addition of low-level fencing to reduce incidences of plants being trampled.

Lessons Learned

- Online and face-to-face conversations with residents and local businesses helped build a belief that change was possible and worth the impact of construction works and further road closures.
- Renovating overgrown planting around a nearby car park was a low-cost solution to improve natural surveillance, make it more useable, and placate residents concerned about the loss of on-street parking spaces.
- Partnership working between the Stobswell Forum community group, Sustrans Scotland, Dundee City Council and Scottish Water has been central to the successes of this project.

This case study has been prepared in collaboration by Dundee City Council and the National Planning Improvement Team at the Improvement Service. We publish good practice case studies identified through our work on the National Planning Improvement Framework and the National Planning Hub. They aim to support the sharing of good practice and build collaboration across the sector in addressing common challenges. Please email us at npi@improvementservice.org.uk if your authority has a good practice case study to share.

