

# New Practice

## 21014\_George Square and The Avenues

Stage One Engagement Report - Public Summary  
Final Issue 11 Jul 2022

# Public Summary

Digital surveys and conversations around George Square and the surrounding Avenues have generated a wealth of information and data - helping to better understand local residents' perceptions of these two project areas, and providing significant input to shape the development of design proposals as the project progresses into design stages. The following is a summary of these findings for the people of Glasgow.

## Methodology

A project specific website - [www.ourplaceglasgow.com](http://www.ourplaceglasgow.com) - and two digital surveys were launched on Friday 11th February 2022 and ran until Tuesday 15th March. Participants could respond to the either, or both surveys with one focussed specifically on 'George Square' and a second survey which covered design outcomes for 'The Avenues' generally.

The website launch and survey period was supported through a campaign of promoted social media encouraging participation in the surveys and linking to further information on the project, responses to these posts were monitored and included within the review of participant responses.

In addition, a dedicated email address and voicemail number were established, allowing the public to send thoughts and queries beyond their participation in the two digital surveys. These accounts have been monitored since 11th February 2022 and will remain active throughout the overall project.

This report collates data from responses to surveys - from calls and emails to the direct project communication channels and from social media comments - and presents quantitative and qualitative information and insights drawn from multiple choice and open text questions, providing a thematic breakdown of responses where appropriate.

## Overall Engagement Statistics

Total unique visitors to [ourplaceglasgow.com](http://ourplaceglasgow.com) during survey live period: 3,916

Total responses to George Square survey: 912

Total responses to Avenues Survey: 302

Social Media Campaign - Total impressions: 16,100

Social Media Campaign - Total click-throughs to website: 606

# Findings

## Direct Communication via email and telephone

During this initial engagement period, 24 emails and voicemail messages were received, and a summary of themes are included below.

### **Transport and active travel**

The most common topic raised in direct messages was around proposals to change road patterns around George Square and the surrounding Avenues, and introduce improvements to active travel infrastructure. There were a mixture of comments expressing support for this, encouraging bold change to support active travel, while other comments tended to focus on the impact that reduced car traffic and parking might have on local businesses. There was also commentary that disabled citizen's accessibility needs should be carefully considered as part of these changes.

### **Statues and Monuments**

A number of direct messages focussed on statues and monuments within George Square and the city centre. Some noted disapproval with proposals to relocate or remove existing statues. A majority of commentators on this topic however noted a desire for statues and monuments in the Square and city centre to offer opportunity to reflect and represent figures and issues beyond the current focus of monuments, including representation of greater diversity and reflection on Glasgow's historic role within the slave trade.

### **Improved provision of seating, greenery and amenities in George Square**

Some messages requested that the project focus on improving the provision of seating, tables, lighting and greenery within George Square, as well as the potential inclusion of public toilets and food and beverage kiosks within the civic space.

### **Objections to development**

A number of respondents expressed their objections to the project overall. These included expressions of interest in retaining the current form of George Square, and requests for resources and funding to be used on other issues, in particular road surface improvements in the city.

## Engagement with project through social media

The project made use of promoted social media posts to advertise the project and encourage participation in the two stage one digital surveys. Over the course of the duration of the survey period, promoted posts were seen 16,100 times, prompting 606 clicks to the project website. Responses on these posts were monitored and a summary of key topics is provided here:

### **Priority of project over other topics**

A common theme of comments was an expressed priority of commentators that resources and funding currently directed towards the George Square and Avenues project be directed

elsewhere. Common alternatives included upkeep of roads and pavements, and other civic amenities in the city.

### **Objection to change**

A number of commentators suggested a preference to leave George Square and surrounding Avenues as they currently are.

### **Terminology of Avenues**

A small number of commentators suggested that the use of Avenues to describe the key routes highlighted in the study was inappropriate, and instead should be referred to as streets.

### **General traffic management within the city centre**

Traffic issues within the city centre were identified as a significant challenge. The impact of stationary cars with engines running was suggested as a contributing factor to increased air pollution.

### **Consultation fatigue**

A number of commentators noted that this current stage of engagement follows a number of previous consultation exercises, and suggested scepticism at changes being implemented.

## **Digital Surveys**

Given the large range of topics explored across the two surveys, a number of significant themes that have emerged from the analysis process are introduced below:

### **Balancing a wide range of needs and opinions**

Analysis across a range of questions clearly highlights that George Square and the Avenues project area is generally not perceived favourably by respondents. A key finding of the analysis is that there exists a significant difference in opinion and need, as is to be expected of a large cohort of respondents. This affects respondents' perceptions of the Square and Avenues currently, and how they would prefer to see concerns addressed. This was particularly evident around topics including: heritage and monuments, active travel and the role of George Square as a space of protest and activism.

A key consideration as the project moves into design stages and propositional information is developed for public feedback will be balancing differing needs and remaining sensitive to the complexities of designing a central public space for a city with diverse communities.

### **Broad support for ambitious re-development of the project area**

Responses to a number of key questions in the surveys demonstrate that there is a majority of support for some of the more ambitious aspects of the redesign process. This included a significant majority of support for an increase in the total area of green space within George Square, the relocation of some statues from their current locations in the Square, and the closure of streets surrounding George Square to private vehicles.

### **Consultation fatigue**

While the vast majority of responses gathered provided positive and valuable feedback and information to feed into the design process, a number of participants noted fatigue and scepticism with the engagement process, linked to an observation on a number of previous consultation exercises with little visible progress on-site. Many requested some propositional design information on which to provide feedback, this will be addressed in the design stages as emerging concept designs are used to explore public reaction.

### **Deeper engagement with history, heritage, legacy and representation**

A number of responses demonstrated a need to create engagement which delves deeper into the topics of heritage, both around the monuments and statues in the project area as well as wider conversations around the complex legacy of Glasgow's built heritage and how this is represented in future development across the city. There is potential opened up in these responses for support to reconfiguring monuments in George Square, with further responses elaborating a desire to see new forms of celebration and exploration of history and heritage in the built environment. This suggests a need for further engagement and study, working with key stakeholders to conceptualise how this is integrated into design work being led by the wider project team.

## **Key Thematic Learning**

The two surveys were broken down into key themes to help structure the information shared. These themes were; greenspace, future uses, history and legacy, the environment, and active travel and transport. Key reflections from each theme are presented below:

### **Greenspace**

Quantitative analysis demonstrated a clear support for the inclusion of greenspace in George Square (88% support) and the potential expansion of this greenspace (82% support). Of the case studies of other prominent public spaces presented in the survey, Bryant Park, representing a 'green park square' typology, was the most supported (receiving votes from 48%) or respondents. Participants linked additional greenspace to a greater interest in spending time in the Square, 80%, agreeing that they would be more likely to spend time in the Square if there were more greenspace.

### **Future uses**

Participants broadly supported a range of future uses for George Square that supported space for rest, relaxation and social interaction in smaller groups; of the range of options presented to participants, the most popular were seating, spaces to spend time during lunch breaks and lawn spaces. A number of participants did express interest in the use of the Square for street markets and night time activities. This was tempered by a number of participants who expressed a desire that the Square not be used as regularly or at all for larger scale commercial events.

### **History and legacy**

While this represented the most contentious of the themes explored in the stage one survey, there was support for future designs for George Square that repositioned or relocated the existing statues and monuments. 67% of participants supported a statement that 'Statues that currently sit within the square, could be relocated either within the Square or within the city to allow for more flexible use of the space', with 51% of those strongly agreeing. There was a more mixed response to whether the Square should host contemporary sculpture, with 51% support to 31% disagreement.

### **The environment**

Participants were able to select from a range of key priorities for the city and the planet, focussing on enhancing air quality and reducing pollution.

### **Active travel and transport**

Participants were highly supportive of creating infrastructure to support walking and wheeling in the city centre. This support extended to proposals to close George Street and St. Vincent street along their boundaries with George Square to private vehicles, with 67% and 65% agreeing with this respectively.