

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Small can be beautiful, as illustrated by the story of the Coltbridge Viaduct

Mega-schemes attract the headlines, but a modest refurbishment project in Edinburgh will reap big dividends too, writes **John Yellowlees**



Talk of transport infrastructure is often dominated by the mega-schemes, which are either strategic investments or vanity projects depending on whether or not you are in favour. Sometimes, however, the smaller schemes repay attention, and one such occurred during the early months of lockdown last year in the leafy Edinburgh suburb of Murrayfield.

The three-arch masonry Coltbridge Viaduct across the Water of Leith had been built by the Caledonian Railway to carry its freight line to Granton. Later there would be a passenger service to Leith North which would be the first to go in 1962, the very last passengers being King Olav of Norway and his entourage on their state visit to Scotland six months after cessation of regular trains. With the demise also of freight in 1967, the tracks were soon lifted, but the route became repurposed as the Roseburn Railway Path for cyclists and walkers.

All seemed well until 2019, when a condition survey for present owner the City of Edinburgh Council found serious deterioration in its condition. Vegetation growth included a mature tree sprouting out of its side. Perhaps surprisingly, the viaduct had never been waterproofed, and water penetration through the arches had led to freeze-thaw cycles causing deep spalling which, combined with mortar loss, could create a hazard to people using the Water of Leith Walkway and street below.

The city set about a comprehensive repair programme. Under contractor Barhale the surface was stripped back so that a membrane could be installed to direct the rainwater into a new soakaway grate system. Lime mortar was applied and the stonework damaged by the tree was replaced by traditionally-cut new stone. Timber steps which had been provided up from the Water of Leith Walkway were life-expired so were replaced by new ones, and the handrail was taken offsite for reblasting.

The route across the viaduct had become cluttered by use of old rail

to support the sides. That on the upstream side was retained as a feature, but the downstream side had to be removed to facilitate sealing of the waterproof membrane at the parapet wall—but sections of the rail were donated to the Institution of Civil Engineers Museum at Heriot-Watt University. At the request of a local antiquarian, the outlet from the tail-lade of the old Coltbridge Mill, one of scores that once lined the banks of the Water of Leith, was restored.

Use of birdcage scaffolding enabled the work to be encapsulated, while a mobile elevating work platform facilitated attention to the arch that crosses the street leading to Coltbridge Gardens. The contractor's responsible performance which won praise from the local community was recognised by the Considerate Contractor scheme, and it proved possible to keep the viaduct open to cyclists and pedestrians until the scheme was almost complete in July 2020, when a short closure was necessary to catch up on Covid-related delays.

So why is all this of more than local interest? Not all cyclists crossing the viaduct may be aware that they are on National Cycle Network Route No 1, which could take them all the way from Dover to Shetland! If a tragedy of Edinburgh's transport was the loss of the city's entire suburban railway network, a surely Unique Selling Point has been the extent to which the city has gone about repurposing this legacy so that the Roseburn Railway Path across the viaduct is now linked to a host of well-signposted routes for ease of environmentally-friendly commuting and for the joy of exploration.

All of this has been safeguarded by the viaduct's refurbishment, and there is now the possibility of shared use by the successor to the suburban railways in the revived proposal for an Edinburgh Trams route from Granton to the city's south-eastern growth areas which has been endorsed in the council's recent Mobility Plan.

John Yellowlees, Scottish chair, CLT



We will make it our



Get in touch with us to explore funds and opportunities available to upskill employees and grow your company, says **Elise Bonini**

Many people know colleges as a place to study and learn for upskilling, retraining and starting their careers, but what they also do is support local businesses and organisations to grow and thrive in their industry.

Supporting local businesses is a large part of the offering at the college and we are encouraging more businesses to get in touch to explore funds and opportunities available to upskill employees and grow their company, as we ease out of the pandemic.

One such fund is The Flexible Workforce Development Fund which was made available by the Scottish Government through the Scottish Funding Council to provide access to training opportunities for business recovery. This funding allows for companies to access up to £15,000 worth of training and the college is currently engaged with 40 local employers on the scheme.

There is also funding for businesses through the Adopt an Apprentice scheme, to support companies who take on an apprentice affected by redundancy, and Pathway Apprenticeships are available for school leavers not in a job or education to gain work-based learning and qualifications in sectors with skills needs.

Or, if local organisations are looking to take on more staff or upskill existing staff, whilst supporting local young people, the Modern Apprenticeship and Foundation Apprenticeship (for senior phase school pupils) frameworks allow organisations to get part funded employees that will undertake training on the job, whilst being assessed and taught by a member of staff at the college.

Apprenticeships can help adapt,

sustain and strengthen businesses. They are designed by industry for industry to help businesses attract and retain staff by offering high-quality work-based training routes to skilled jobs.

There are many benefits including the chance to upskill their existing workforce, increase productivity and also improve service and product quality. Apprentices play a vital role in supporting businesses and the economy now and for the future. Apprenticeships are funded by SDS (Skills Development Scotland) and they cover the cost of training, registrations with awarding body and skills councils, registration of any additional testing or training required.

Day release courses are also available at the college, where companies can allow their employees out of work one or two days a week to undertake training or qualifications, which will allow employees to bring back new skills and learning, benefitting the organisation and employees personal development.

Working with local businesses is one of our key priorities at South Lanarkshire College. As we recover from the pandemic it is important that as an anchor institution in South Lanarkshire, we support local businesses to upskill employees, create a pipeline for hiring trained and skilled staff and provide businesses with the support they need to thrive.

Local businesses, alongside colleges, are at the heart of communities all across Scotland and it's important that we foster strong relationships to benefit the organisations, individuals and the region.

It's been heartening to hear local employers' commitment looking to



colleges to investing in upskilling their workforce. We have so many opportunities in the college to support your business and employees.

Commitment to invest in young people and in modern apprenticeships has been remarkable. A lot of our partner employers have signed up to the Apprenticeship Recruitment Grant, which supports young people in the region gain training and employment whilst supporting businesses.

business to help

South Lanarkshire College is supporting post-pandemic business recovery



I would encourage any business to get in touch with us to discuss options and funding available to support your employees and organisation. We are here to help.

To find out more and to speak to a member of staff at the college visit: www.slc.ac.uk or contact Elise by emailing elise.bonini@slc.ac.uk.

Elise Bonini, Training and Employment Advisor at South Lanarkshire College

A three-year plan to make Scottish Mediation more diverse and accessible

We don't want any restrictions to be placed on the potential of mediation, says **Graham Boyack**

Scottish Mediation recently renewed its strategy for the next three years and in doing so determined that our vision is of a Scotland where people, communities and organisations respectfully deal with disagreements. It might seem a straightforward thing to say. However there are lots of examples across Scotland where we are simply not good at respectfully dealing with disagreements.

In doing so one thing we recognised early on was that in order for Scottish Mediation to be effective we need to better reflect the diversity of the population we serve. Our thinking in this area has been influenced by an exercise we did using Hallmark of Inclusion which examined how Scottish Mediation itself measures how people feel about their workplace envi-

ronment and looking at how safe people feel in work, how accessible we are as an organisation, our diversity and how well people feel supported.

The results were essentially doing okay, but could do better, so we are now working through some practical ways to improve things.

There's a couple of ways we're looking to take things forward. The first is to understand how reflective of Scotland our Register of Mediators is, the second to ensure that we welcome and encourage a diverse range of people to be involved in our organisation.

On the first objective there are compelling reasons to act. The first is that we want mediation to be something that people will seek to use in a range of different situations and we need to ensure that mediators are available in communities across Scotland

to do that work. Put bluntly if mediation is seen as a white middle-class, late-career activity we will restrict its potential across Scotland. The second is that by having a diverse range of mediators we are likely to improve the practice of all mediators through the sharing and learning we facilitate. That comes from different thinking, challenging norms and providing insight into different cultures. During the pandemic we have benefited from speaking to people from across the world and learning from their experiences, I believe there is a similar potential by learning from a more diverse community in Scotland.

On our second objective, ensuring our organisation is diverse and welcoming will support good governance and critical thinking in Scottish Mediation. We are about to look at recruiting

new Board members and have been thinking about how we can ensure our recruitment goes beyond our usual networks so that our Board reflects Scottish society. Over the past few years we have increased our spread across Scotland and have a good gender balance but we don't have representation from the BAME community and from younger people. We are looking to tackle that and if you're interested, we'd like to hear from you.

As you might imagine our new strate-

gy maps out work in a range of areas that we need to tackle. We'd like to see better access to mediation for everyone, more use of mediation in organisations, mediation run by young people in schools, mediation as a first step in civil justice and more opportunities for everyone to learn how to take a mediation approach to solving disputes.

Graham Boyack, Director, Scottish Mediation



Let's find practical solutions to issue of school exclusions

Services that can adapt to the needs of the individual child regardless of behaviour or disability must be provided, writes **Lynne Bell**



I created an organisation at LOVE Learning to bridge the gap between social care and education. This was done out of frustration at a lack of services for young people I worked with and to find a solution to this challenge.

There are many young people who are excluded from education due to a family crisis, social and emotional behaviours, a disability or other additional support needs (ASN). There are many restrictions for people with ASN, and often schools have large classes or are not resourced for children who are mainstreaming with such needs. As a result, children with ASN are five times more likely to have a school exclusion. Scottish Government statistics data stated "having an ASN also increases the likelihood of exclusion. The rate of exclusion for pupils with an ASN was 49.3 exclusions per 1000 pupils. This is almost five times the rate for pupils without an additional support need".

Children who live in poverty are adversely affected by school exclusions. Living in an area with relatively more deprivation is also associated with a higher exclusion rate. Rates of exclusion per 1,000 pupils are more than four times greater for pupils living in the 20 per cent of areas associated with most deprivation, compared with pupils living in the 20 per cent associated with the least deprivation, as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SMID). Children in such areas are also more likely to suffer from mental health issues.

These stark figures highlight the need for services that can adapt to the needs of the child. Education that can be delivered historically, within the community or family home, delivered by staff who are trained to engage and support children and

families regardless of behaviour or disability. However, there are often gaps in services themselves; bureaucracy, grey areas with compliance and a lack of budget to provide services exactly where they are needed.

I welcome that the Scottish Government is acknowledging and trying to address the issues of budgets and dedicating services to support our children and young people. An example of this is a desire to close the attainment gap with funding such as that provided by Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). This fund is awarded to schools to raise attainment for children living in poverty. However, there are still gaps as PEF funding is allocated to the school.

Children who are excluded need social care after the school gates close to engage them back to learning. Many schools are however not prepared to spend budgets on services that are delivered during holidays, evenings or weekends when they need it most. Engaging children away from school is also sometimes the only option to learning, but budgets will be spent on where it impacts on the school timetable and not necessarily on the holistic needs of a child. We must invest in our children and do more to act to bridge these gaps, finding solutions to school exclusion. Organisations must also work together, adapting and overcoming any obstacles that prevents our children learning.

Evidence shows that learning and inclusion during childhood improves mental wellbeing, confidence and overall resilience, creating happy and healthy adults. Embracing practical solutions to creatively engaging children and young people within our communities must be the utmost priority.

Lynne Bell, CEO, LOVE Learning



HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

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