Ashgrove Connects

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Stage 1 Report

May 2022

Project website: https://ashgroveconnects.commonplace.is/

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What we've done so far: Timeline

The indicative project timeline of the key stages is outlined below. Aberdeen City Council has employed a consultant, Atkins, to work with the local community to deliver Stage 1 and 2.

- Stage 1: Define
- Stage 2: Develop
- Stage 3: Design
- Stage 4: Detail
- Stage 5: Deliver
- Stages 1 and 2: Spring to Autumn 2022 (Atkins commission)
- Stages 3 to 5: approximately 2 to years (subject to approvals and funding)

The first stage of the project has focussed on the following elements:

- Community and stakeholder engagement to understand people's experiences of using the streets
- Data collection and analysis to understand how people move through and use the streets
- Technical appraisal to understand constraints and opportunities within the streets

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What we've done so far: Engagement activities

Between Tuesday 8th March and Sunday 3rd April, engagement took place to understand people's experiences of using the streets.

- Engagement in numbers:
  - 958 visitors to the project website
  - 10 activities held
  - 130 respondents
  - 670 contributions
  - 150 news subscribers
- Walking audit
- Live webinar

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What we've done so far: Data collection

Between March and April, the following surveys were undertaken to understand how people move through and use the streets.

- Traffic Speed and Volume (TSV) survey to monitor the number and speed of vehicles.
- Public Life Survey (PLS) to monitor people movements and activity levels within a space.
- Pedestrian and Cyclist counts to count the number of people walking and cycling.
- Parking survey to monitor the capacity and demand for parking and loading

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What we've done so far: Stakeholder Working Group

A Stakeholder Working Group has been formed to ensure community and stakeholder representatives are able to review and validate key outputs at each project stage as well as support the delivery team with communication to the wider community.

At various stages of the project, the group will seek representatives from different street user groups such as local residents, institutions, community groups, emergency services and disability groups.

- Aberdeen City Council
- Local residents
- University of Aberdeen
- NHS Grampian
- Community Council
- Emergency Services
- Community Associations
- Cycling organisation
- Aberdeen Access Panel
- Atkins

The working group will meet regularly at every stage of the project.

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What we've found out: Demographics of respondents

Respondents were asked about their gender and age to provide an understanding of how balanced the engagement process had been. There were slightly more female respondents and most fell within the 35-44 age category.

Pie chart: Respondents' gender (number = 73)

Pie chart: Respondents' age (number = 86)

All demographic questions were optional and only capture those who submitted this information through the project website. Respondents could only select one option for each question.

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What we've found out: Travel habits of respondents

Respondents were asked about their connection to the area to provide an understand of their interest in the project.

Almost half of respondents were local to the area when combining 'I live here' and 'I work here'.

Pie chart: Respondents' connection to the area (number = 163)

Respondents were asked about their preferred travel mode to provide an understanding of how people move around.

Most respondents prefer to travel by active modes when combining 'on foot' and 'by bike' followed 'by car'.

Respondents' preferred travel mode (number = 170)

All demographic questions were optional and only capture those who submitted this information through the project website. Respondents could select multiple options for each question.

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What we've found out: Location of respondents

Respondents were asked for their postcode to provide an understanding of where contributions were received from. The maps below present the postcodes of respondents, covering Aberdeenshire and the local area.

The colour of the icons corresponds to the average sentiment of the respondent's comments (red = negative; orange = mostly negative; yellow = neutral; light green = mostly positive; and green = positive) and the number represents how many respondents provided the same postcode.

Postcode maps: Map of respondents' postcodes (number = 57)

All demographic questions were optional and only capture those who submitted this information through the online survey

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What we've found out: Location of contributions

The total number of contributions received was 677 of which 245 were comments and 432 were agreements with other comments. The map below shows the locations of contributions grouped together which were evenly spread throughout the design area

The colours correspond to the sentiment of the comment (red = negative; orange = mostly negative; yellow = neutral; light green = mostly positive; and green = positive) and the numbers indicate how many comments are grouped together.

Location of verified comments

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What we've found out: Most popular topics

The word cloud presents the topics respondents chose to comment on, with the most popular appearing the largest. Overall, the top three topics respondents commented on were traffic and parking, moving around on foot, by bike or wheelchair, and feeling safe.

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What we've found out: Reasons for sentiment

Overall, respondents felt negative or mostly negative about the topics they chose to comment on.

The top three reasons why respondents felt this way were difficult to cross, difficult to walk, cycle and wheel and unpleasant environment.

Respondents also frequently gave reasons such as high traffic speed and volume, poor junctions, confusing traffic lights and congestion.

Pie chart: Respondents' answers to 'why do you feel this way' (number = 367)

Pie chart: Respondents' answers to 'how do you feel about this' (number = 245)

Top reasons for sentiment:

- Difficult to cross
- Difficult to walk, cycle and wheel
- Unpleasant environment

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What we've found out: Suggested improvements

The top three improvements respondents suggested were improve crossings, slow vehicle speeds and improve the look and feel of the street.

Respondents also frequently suggested improve access to greenspace, better maintenance, safer conditions for people cycling, reduce traffic volume and add more bins.

Pie chart: Respondents answers to 'how could we improve this' (number = 329)

Most agreed with comment: "The Ashgrove Rd/Foresterhil Rd staggered junction is confusing and overly complicated. Multiple times as a car driver and cyclist I have experienced near misses due to traffic in the wrong lane."

Top suggested improvements:

- Improve crossings
- Slow vehicle speeds
- Improve the look and feel

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What we've found out: Traffic and parking

Respondents felt either negatively or mostly negatively about traffic and parking due to it being difficult to cross, difficult to walk, cycle or wheel and unpleasant environment.

Pie chart: Respondents' sentiment towards traffic and parking (number = 90)

Respondents also regularly gave reasons such as confusing and poor visibility at junctions, high traffic speeds, and too much congestion.

Survey respondent: "Congestion in traffic, dangerous for drivers and pedestrians."

Respondents suggested this could be improved by improve crossings, slow vehicles and add signage / navigation.

Respondents also regularly suggested improvements such as add traffic lights, restrict parking at junction corners, and add traffic calming measures.

Survey respondent: "Traffic Island or similar to stop vehicles travelling from the Foresterhill Road direction cutting the corner at high speed as the turn right into Cornhill Road."

Respondent on any other comments under traffic and parking: "Ashgrove Road West was a better place to live when there was on street parking. The parking reduced the speed of the traffic. Now at times one takes their life in their hands when crossing the street."

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What we've found out: Moving around

Respondents felt negatively or mostly negatively about moving around on foot, by bike and wheel due to it being difficult to walk, cycle or wheel, difficult to cross, and unpleasant environment.

Pie chart: Respondents' sentiment towards moving around (number = 70)

Respondents also regularly gave reasons such as poor lighting, poor access to facilities and poor pavements conditions.

Survey respondent: "Junction [Cornhill Terrace/Road] is very wide cars enter/exit very fast. Had near misses cycling uphill with vehicles using junction at speed."

Respondents suggested this could be improved by improve crossings, improve pavements, and improve the look and feel of the street.

Respondents also regularly suggested improvements such as provide on-street cycling infrastructure, slow vehicle speeds and add more places to sit and rest.

Survey respondent: "Maintenance of trees - overhanging branches are a problem. Also not enough room on west side for wheelchairs due to trees taking up pavement. Need a safer crossing from Beattie Avenue to May Baird as common route to get to Westburn Playpark or Cornhill Library."

Respondent on any other comments under moving around: “It's necessary to build a dual path for both cyclists and pedestrians and the width of the road is suitable enough to do that. This can encourage more people to cycle around neighbourhood and so the best solution for both traffic and air pollution.”

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What we’ve found out: Feeling safe

Respondents felt negatively or mostly negatively about feeling safe due to it being difficult to cross, difficult to walk, cycle and wheel, unpleasant environment, and poorly lit.

Pie chart: Respondents' sentiment towards feeling safe (number = 23)

Respondents also regularly gave reasons such as tree roots causing issues to properties and pavement conditions, and high traffic speeds.

Survey respondent: “Traffic regularly run a red light, no filter to turn right onto Westburn Drive. Drivers with road rag speeding through junction.”

Respondents suggested this could be improved by improve crossings, slow vehicle speeds and improve street lighting.

Survey respondent: “No new trees should be planted outside 1 to 19 Ashgrove Road.”

Respondent on any other comments under feeling safe: “The streetlights are poor and we have a problem with cyclists on the pavement. Once I took the car alongside at 30 mph and the cyclist overtook me on the pavement.”

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What we’ve found out: Other topics

Ability to meet people, socialise and play: “Install more charging points for electric cars somewhere along the whole street. Plant for example wild flowers on the green belt in the corner of Ashgrove Rd and Berryden Rd beside bus stop to improve biodiversity. Maybe provide some benches?”

Bus stops and routes: “If the Council are committed to traffic reduction and net zero goals, then the bus service provision need to be addressed. There are no buses on Ashgrove Road West that serve the City Centre.”

Attractiveness and maintenance of streets: “Trees add greatly to the quality of the environment, both physically and in their effect on our sense of wellbeing. Look after them well!”

Sense of identity and belonging: “This is a wonderful opportunity to reduce the width of the street. Understanding the critical nature of emergency vehicles and their need to respond to emergencies aside we could have more planting, wider pavements and places to sit on a quiet street. Pedestrian crossings should be considered intermittently and a sense of place can be created if the street is going to become a c class …”

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What we’ve found out: Walking Audits

Priorities identified by representatives from NHS Grampian included:

- Moving around: difficult to cross the road, poor pavement conditions, and poor conditions for cycling.
- Traffic and parking: high traffic speeds, confusing junction at Foresterhill Road, and too much space given to parking in places where there is little demand for it.
- Streets and spaces: narrow and unkept pavements.

Discussions also identified good public transport and cycle parking provision at the hospital, and, although the speed of traffic can cause safety concerns, the area feels safe overall.

NHS Grampian scoring wheel

Priorities identified by representatives from Community Groups included:

- Moving around: difficult to cross the road, no priority for people at side roads and issues caused by people cycling on the pavements.
- Traffic and parking: high traffic speeds and pollution impact on enjoyment of walking along the road, and poor visibility and congestion at junctions cause problems.
- Feeling safe: although the area feels safe, the high traffic speeds can make the road feel unsafe for people walking, and the high walls along Ashgrove Road can feel isolating.

Discussions also identified the positive connection the community have to the local area and the potential for cycling demand to increase if changes are made to improve the road.

Community Groups scoring wheel

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What we've found out: Walking Audits

Top priorities identified by residents included:

- Traffic and parking: noisy and busy environment at peak times, environment feels unsafe due to traffic volume and speed, poor visibility at side roads and confusion at junctions.
- Streets and spaces: litter on pavements and lack of regular maintenance.
- Moving around: difficult to cross at junctions, and pavements can be narrow in places.
- Feeling safe: poor visibility from parked cars, overhanging vegetation and poor lighting.
- Social contact: limited social contact across the road due to high volume of traffic.

Discussions also identified the enjoyment residents get from seeing students walking to the university and the potential for community information to be displayed on the street.

Residents scoring wheel

Top priorities identified by representatives from the University of Aberdeen included:

- Public transport: busy bus stops at peak times narrow pavements and, although there is university shuttle bus, there are limited alternatives for students.
- Traffic and parking: streets can feel narrow, busy and fast; people who cycle don't feel respected on the road and visibility is a challenge; Controlled Parking Zone can be confusing.
- Moving around: walking is OK but can be difficult for people to cycle.
- Streets and spaces: Ashgrove Road can feel dark and isolated due to the high walls.

Discussions also identified the opportunity to look at creating more space at the main university bus stop on Ashgrove Road West and the future roll out of more e-bikes for use between campuses.

University of Aberdeen scoring wheel

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What we've found out: Walking Audits

School children made the following observations on the closest streets surrounding Cornhill Primary School:

- Walking and cycling: most pupils walk to school as they live close by. Not many pupils cycle although some would like to. On Ashgrove Road West, pupils noticed the tree roots causing problems for the pavements and didn't feel the painted cycle lane offered much protection from the speed of traffic. "It is safe to walk and cycle but sometimes the cars speed"
- Buses, trains and other ways of getting places: not many pupils use the bus services but, those who do, say they are not frequent. "The bus takes me where I want to go but they sometimes take a while"
- Cars and traffic: pupils think Ashgrove Road West is a nice street, but the traffic goes too fast. Pupils don't feel they can cross Ashgrove Road West safely on their own to get to Westburn Park so they will walk to Westburn Drive to cross at the traffic lights. "The road is very dangerous and the tree roots are unsafe."
- Streets, parks and other outdoor places: pupils really like Cornhill playground next to the school and that's where they meet friends. Pupils felt there was potential to make more of the greenspace at the corner of Ashgrove Road West and Braefoot Road as they noticed it's popular for people walking to and from Cornhill. "I like the trees. On the main road, it is noisy and smelly. Add more play stuff in the area."
- Meeting and talking with other children: most of the pupils play near their houses but they also use the playground next to the school. They don't meet friends on Ashgrove Road West or Ashgrove Road. "We meet at my house and park then we play on the swing."
- Feeling proud and part of your neighbourhood: pupils like their neighbourhood. "I feel proud to be part of this neighbourhood."
- Feeling safe in your neighbourhood: most of the pupils feel safe in the area but suggested crossings could be improved to help them feel more confident when crossing Ashgrove Road West. "More zebra crossings."

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How this is developing: Overview of Emerging Themes

From the information gathered during Stage 1 of the project, the following themes have emerged.

These themes have been validated by the Stakeholder Working Group and will be used to develop design objectives which will guide the design development process.

- Traffic
- Crossings and junctions
- Better crossings and improved junctions
- Place quality and greenspace
- Walking and disabilities
- Cycling
- Parking

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How this is developing: Traffic

People told us:

Overall, people appear to be advocating for a slower, quieter street environment that feels safer to move through and spend time in.

The perception is that traffic speed and volume is too high and not appropriate for the area.

People reported feeling exposed and vulnerable to traffic and that the street environment can be very congested at peak times.

Findings from Traffic, Speed and Volume (TSV) Survey (March 2022):

On average, there are over 10,000 vehicles travelling along stretches of Ashgrove Road West and over 6,000 along stretches of Ashgrove Road per weekday.

62% of vehicles on Ashgrove Road West and 43% of vehicles on Ashgrove Road travel above 30mph.

Almost all vehicles travel above 20mph which is generally the speed at which people perceive speeds to be a problem within residential settings.

Reducing traffic speed and volume is clearly a priority for people and the TSV survey validate these concerns.

It's important to recognise that although this is a problem affecting many people in the Ashgrove Connects area, traffic speeds are not out with the range of other similar streets across the UK.

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How this is developing: Crossings and junctions

People told us:

Overall, people appear to be advocating for more crossings and safer junctions, particularly where there are strong movements of people.

A lack of formal crossing points is making it difficult to cross and access amenities throughout.

People feel Ashgrove Road West is too wide and the traffic lights are confusing whereas vehicles appear to be parking too close to junctions and reducing overall visibility on Ashgrove Road and Laurelwood Avenue.

Findings from Public Life Study (PLS) (March 2022):

The PLS provides an indication of how people currently walk through and use the Ashgrove Road / Berryden Road / Back Hilton Road junction.

While many people cross at the traffic lights on Berryden Road, others clearly choose to cross the street at different locations. Many people cross in straight lines, while others will alter their route, perhaps making use of dropped kerbs or making themselves more visible to vehicles.

There were very few instances of people spending time in the area other than dog walkers using the greenspace, people using the ATM outside the Spar or waiting to be picked up.

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How this is developing: Place quality and greenspace

People told us:

Overall, people appear to be advocating for improved place quality and greenspace.

Trees are important, particularly to those who live in the area, but need improved to protect properties and pavements.

There's recognition that traffic appears to create a severance between parks and greenspaces and the high walls on Ashgrove Road can also feel isolating to some.

The distinctiveness of the streets as you move through the area is also important to recognise.

Findings from Greenspace study (March 2022):

There is a wide variety of greenspace to the north and south of the design area.

The small pockets of greenspace within the design area mainly consist of grass and trees without anything to invite people to make more use of the space. Some of the playparks are hidden by the high walls.

The larger areas of greenspace mainly exist to the south of the design area, Westburn Park and Victoria Park.

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How this is developing: Walking and disabilities

People told us:

Overall, people feel the streets could be improved for walking, particularly for those with disabilities.

Poor pavement conditions, overhanging vegetation, a lack of priority and continuity at junctions, poor lighting and a lack of resting places were noted as barriers.

There is recognition that wider pavements can provide a safety barrier to traffic and walking adds vibrancy to the street.

Findings from Pedestrian Count (March 2022):

The number of people walking within the design area is at its lowest near North Anderson Drive and increases towards Westburn Drive and Ashgrove Road.

This is perhaps due to the proximity to Westburn Park, the city centre and services.

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How this is developing: Cycling

People told us:

Overall, there appears to be recognition that the street environment is not suitable for most people to cycle on but, if this was improved, the potential is there for demand to increase.

Traffic conditions, a lack of joined up infrastructure, poor visibility at junctions and signal times at traffic lights were noted as key barriers. Many people raised concerns about people cycling on the pavement which is an indication that the street environment is not suitable.

Onward journeys from Ashgrove Road West, Ashgrove Road and Laurelwood Avenue were also highlighted as areas for consideration.

Findings from Cyclist Counts (2022):

The number of people cycling is much lower than the number of people walking throughout the design area.

A large proportion of cycling takes place on the pavements, particularly at the Cornhill Terrace and Westburn Road junctions with Ashgrove Road West.

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How this is developing: Parking

People told us:

Overall, there appear to be mixed views on parking.

On Ashgrove Road West, people feel the rules around the Controlled Parking Zone can be confusing. On Ashgrove Road and Laurelwood Avenue, people feel parts of the street are constrained by parking and impede visibility at junctions.

There is recognition that parking impacts on those moving around and the safety of junctions.

Findings from Parking Survey (April 2022):

On Ashgrove Road, parking was near full capacity overnight and in the early hours of the morning. Demand for parking fell throughout the day, with a minor rise around midday on Tuesday, before rising again in the evening.

On Ashgrove Road West, parking remained well below the total capacity on both surveyed days with a slight increase during the day on Tuesday. On Saturday, results show a very low number of parked vehicles, indicating that demand is primarily driven by employment.

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Next steps

Stage 2: Develop (Summer 2022)

The second stage of the project will focus on the following elements:

- Community & stakeholder engagement
- Design options development
- Traffic modelling

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Ashgrove Connects

Thank you to everyone who participated in Stage 1 of the project.

For more information and to stay up to date as the project progresses, please visit the project website: https://ashgroveconnects.commonplace.is/ or contact Emily Davie by emailing Emily.davie@atkinsglobal.com or call 0131 221 5770.