

# LITTLE FRANCE PARK, EDINBURGH

## INTEGRATING ACTIVE TRAVEL ROUTES WITHIN A MASTERPLAN FROM THE OUTSET

Location: Edinburgh, Scotland  
Implemented: 2016 - ongoing

**The Little France Park cycling and walking paths provide an interesting and relevant case study demonstrating how active travel and green infrastructure can be deliberately integrated from the start of a masterplanned development process, and both the challenges and success that this can involve.**

Little France Park is a strategic section of green infrastructure for both Edinburgh and the region. Previously known as the South East Wedge Parkland, it forms part of a larger development area in south east Edinburgh and adjacent parts of Midlothian, including the regeneration area of Craigmillar, the new BioQuarter including Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and new housing developments in Shawfair, Midlothian. Central to the success of Little France Park and to the entire redevelopment area is the provision of high-quality cycle and active travel routes set within the parkland. These will ensure connectivity and cohesion between new and existing communities, and between them and new places of employment and activity.

Provision for these green active travel routes moving through the Little France Park landscape parkland setting have been integrated as part of the larger development masterplan from the start. The initial hardscape elements of these paths have been complete since early 2016, with the later phases of implementation and soft landscape establishment still ongoing. When fully realised the parkland will constitute a major element of the Edinburgh Living Landscape. The layout and design of the green walking and cycling paths within Little France Park prioritise utility journeys, and will be complemented by and connected with other paths through the park and landscape enhancements in future delivery phases.



View toward Greendykes and the new residential developments to the East of Little France Park



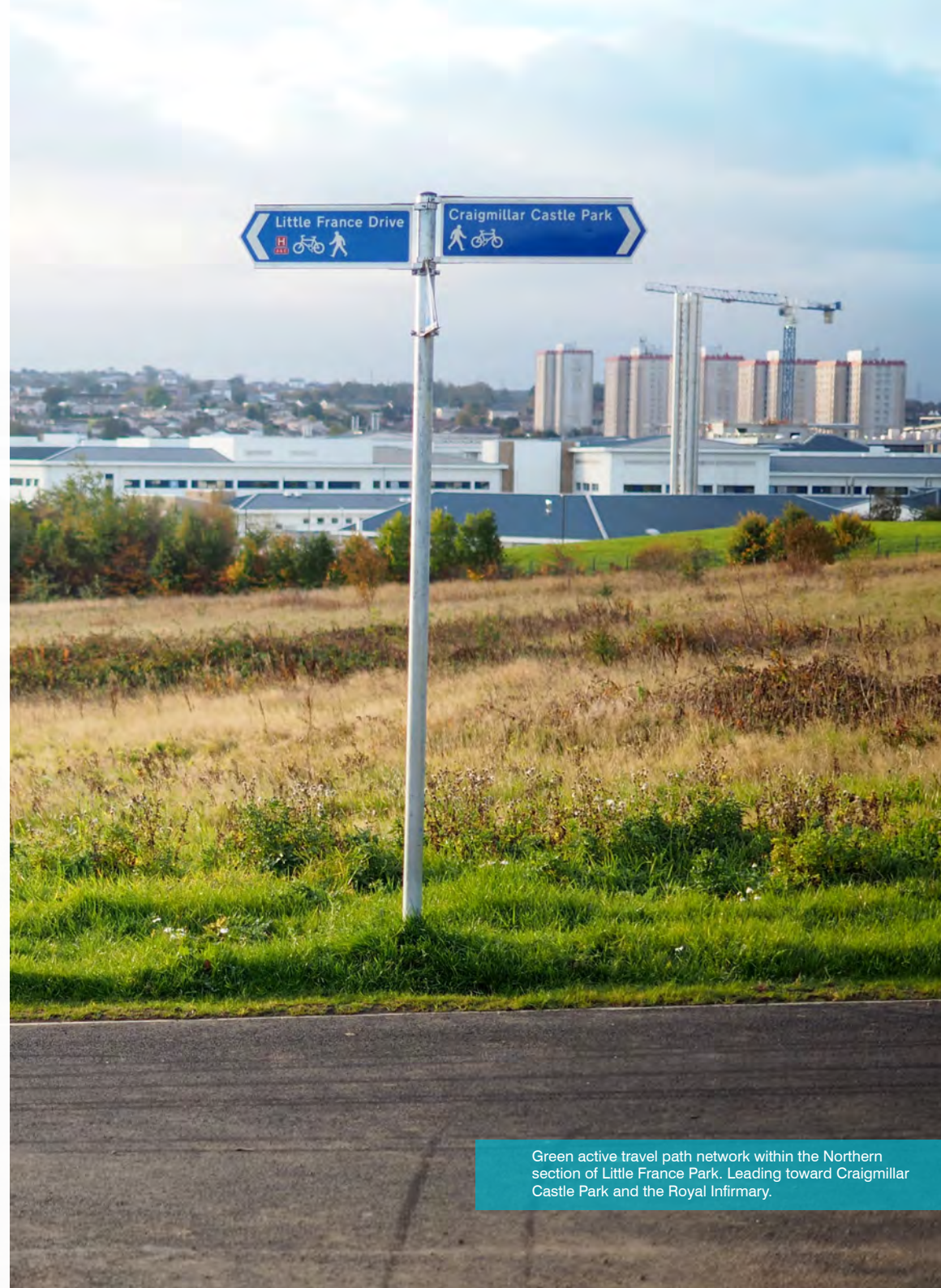
## PROJECT BACKGROUND

The progression of the Little France Park project has recently been managed by the Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust (ELGT). Following a feasibility study in 2013, ELGT were approached by the City of Edinburgh Council in 2014 due to their status as an independent environmental charity. The project had stalled for a time due to land ownership issues, and so ELGT's role was to bring the variety of local partners and stakeholders together, facilitate the process of finalising a design approach for Little France Park, package funding together, and deliver the resultant masterplanned landscape design, including implementation of the green active travel routes.

A key part of this role involved ELGT drawing together the range of relevant project stakeholders to enable the project to progress. The parkland occupies land under ownership of both the City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish Enterprise, but is also relevant to a number of other organisations. Stakeholders included City of Edinburgh Council Parks & Greenspace, EDI Group, NHS Lothian, SNH, Scottish Enterprise, University of Edinburgh, Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh, and Forestry Commission Scotland. Transparency within these partnerships was crucial to gain the trust of the stakeholders, and a shared vision for the delivery of the park enabled any potential blockages to be overcome.

A revised masterplan was agreed and a consultant appointed to compile more detailed costing based on existing specifications and proposals. Funding commitments and staff resources from most of the stakeholders enabled a successful funding application to the Sustrans Community Links Fund, with match funding provided by the EDI Group and City of Edinburgh Council. The £600,000 total funding secured was used to enable the design and implementation of the hard landscape aspects of these new high-quality walking and cycling routes ahead of the full realisation of Little France Park. These were completed in 2016.

The park was previously undeveloped low-quality arable land. This provided a unique opportunity to design and implement a high-quality path network and cycle infrastructure with few constraints, forming more direct and convenient connections than similar journeys by car or public transport, and through an extensive and attractive park landscape. The green active travel paths implemented in this first phase form an off-street cycle corridor, and have been essential to improving overall accessibility and connections in the area in the short term. When complete, the new masterplan for Little France Park will complement these active travel routes with biodiverse parkland with opportunities for outdoor recreation, facilitating further social and health benefits for those in the nearby area.



Green active travel path network within the Northern section of Little France Park. Leading toward Craigmillar Castle Park and the Royal Infirmary.



The parkland will form an important part of the regional green network, providing a focus for local and sub-regional leisure and amenity, improved connectivity and habitat quality and diversity for wildlife.

The fully realised Little France Park design will include three parkland character areas, each integrating walking and cycling routes, but with a different distinct focus. The northern area of the park comprises a south-facing hillside where Hawkhill Wood has been extended, interspersed with meandering cycle and walking trails. These paths connect with the key access node into the park from the north, connecting with the active travel link at Craigmillar Castle and for those coming from Craigmillar town centre through Greendykes. This northern parkland area will focus on natural play, activities and events, with enhancements creating naturalistic, less formalised yet managed grassland and wildflower meadows.

The central area of Little France Park will focus on movement and connections, linking the informal northern meadows to more formal parkland to the south, and connecting new and existing residential areas to the Royal Infirmary and BioQuarter. New paths have been designed to connect with existing cycle routes, helping deliver an integrated and expanded active travel network for the city. This path network will be set within Little France Park's green landscape setting, including a flood water storage area, and habitat enhancements such as wildflower seeding, planting of marginal aquatic species and a pictorial meadow strip along the main access route.

The southern area of Little France Park will be a formal parkland incorporating avenues of trees defining the urban edge to the BioQuarter and the adjacent housing. The paths and planting will frame important views of Craigmillar Castle, Edinburgh Castle and Arthur's Seat from Edmonstone ridge, attracting people to divert to this higher ground or explore circular routes. Together these areas create a parkland that is both habitat and species rich as well as integrating active travel routes as part of a cohesive overarching masterplan.

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One of the main lessons learnt was getting the principle of green infrastructure and active travel combined at an early stage in the process. The benefits of deliberately integrating green infrastructure and active travel [from the start] ensure that the multiple benefits of both are linked. This includes improved health and well being, increased environmental and aesthetic quality, and improvements in quality of place.

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Ross Woodside, Project Manager for implementation and delivery, ELGT

Little France Park. Active travel routes leading toward the BioQuarter and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary from the direction of Greendykes.



## OUTPUTS: WHAT AND HOW?

The new park has offered an opportunity to connect and improve Edinburgh's strategic cycle network, with effective partnership working between different landowners, nature conservancies, local authorities and other stakeholders, to create active travel routes integrated with green infrastructure as part of a planned masterplan approach.

Many outputs of the project have already been realised, with additional phases and establishment of planting still to follow. Once finalised Little France Park will:

- Create a clearly defined low maintenance landscape structure that integrates active travel opportunities
- Ensure newly masterplanned residential areas, business innovation and health-related built environment are easily accessible on foot or by bike, improving connectivity
- Maximise biodiversity through a variety of different habitats and ecotones which together add to Edinburgh's Living Landscape
- Provide a high quality transition between Edinburgh's urban areas, population and rural hinterland
- Add to and enhance existing strategic active travel networks. The cycleways and footpaths through Little France Park connect new and existing destinations and neighbourhoods in south-east Edinburgh, as well as adjacent parts of Midlothian, such as Craigmillar, the BioQuarter, Castlebrae High School, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and new housing developments in Shawfair, Midlothian.

A number of quantifiable outputs have also been recorded during the project's implementation to date. These include:

- 1,470 linear metres of asphalt path created
- 200 linear metres of Type 1 windust path created
- 30 tree standards planted
- 37 street lights installed
- 830 linear metres of woodland edges managed
- 2,940 linear metres of grass verges managed
- 5 directional signs installed
- 1 interpretation sign installed
- 2 cycle counters installed
- 1 barrier removed, 1 chicane installed
- 4 benches installed.



The link from Craigmillar Castle Park to Little France Park. Photo taken at the pedestrian crossing over Craigmillar Castle Road.



## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The primary beneficiaries of the Little France Park greenspace and newly implemented active travel routes are those living and working nearby. These green active travel routes have improved connectivity on foot or by bike for those working at the BioQuarter and nearby, including NHS, University of Edinburgh and Scottish Enterprise staff, as well as those living in nearby residential areas such as Greendykes and Craigmillar. By integrating and improving greenspace as part of new active travel routes, this route also becomes more desirable for use by local people, hospital and business visitors for both necessary journeys as well as a pleasant and easily accessible place to spend time.

In this way, the deliberate planning for greenspace and active travel routes as part of one cohesive masterplan for Little France Park has led to multiple mutually reinforcing and linked benefits for both people and environment. Benefits of the Little France Park masterplan and green active travel routes include:

- Improved connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists to both nearby destinations and as part of longer strategic routes. This will also help reduce journeys made by car to these destinations. An approach implementing these green active travel routes and connections at an early stage prior to the new adjacent housing developments has been particularly beneficial and ensured routes are in place both immediately existing residents and commuters, and ahead of increased demand as the adjacent new developments complete.
- Proximity of high quality greenspace for everyday necessary journeys on foot or by bike, as well as for leisure and recreation. For example, Little France Park can be used by those going for a walk or taking a break from work at the BioQuarter or visiting the hospital, or as a local green amenity space for residents and families. This has a positive impact on health and wellbeing due to both the physical exercise involved and restorative psychological effect of green natural surroundings.
- Improved quality of habitat and biodiversity due to landscape enhancement as part of the fully implemented masterplan. This will include a mix of wetland, meadow grassland, SuDS and woodland creation.
- Improved aesthetic quality, local pride and sense of place.

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[I think the main benefits of the Little France walking and cycling routes are the] fresh air, greenspace, and [opportunity for] exercise. I like the variety of trees, birds, plants. The openness, views, and relative quiet in the middle of the city. [...] I walk more often [because of the Little France Park routes]. They are a good place to relax and think.

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Local resident



Green active travel path network within the Northern section of Little France Park. Leading toward Craigmillar Castle Park and the Royal Infirmary.



## KEY LEARNING POINTS

The Little France Park greenspace and active travel masterplan project exemplifies how partnership working can be successful despite complex land ownership issues and the involvement of a large number of stakeholders. The two key land owners, City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish Enterprise, worked together with other key stakeholders including EDI Group, NHS Lothian, University of Edinburgh and SNH, facilitated by ELGT, to develop a deliverable masterplan for this active greenspace. A key learning from this multi-partner project, was the need for a shared vision and a realistic expectation of the timelines needed to agree and implement a design for the parkland and routes. The process was eased and progressed forward by the involvement of ELGT, who acted as an independent environmental charity outside of local organisational politics to bring stakeholders together around a deliverable vision that would benefit both local community and environment. This is an interesting approach that could be successfully applied to other complex multi-partner projects elsewhere.

Little France Park also demonstrates the way active travel routes and green infrastructure can be successfully integrated with one another from the start of a project. This approach allows for increased health and well-being benefits due to the combination of restorative green natural surroundings together with physical exercise. The attractive green setting and direct nature of the active travel routes within a pleasant parkland setting at Little France Park also acts as an incentive for local people to choose to use these paths over alternative road routes or journeys by car. The combination of green infrastructure with active travel routes has also enhanced the connectivity of nearby residential developments and key destinations surrounding the parkland whilst simultaneously creating a local amenity greenspace, utilising Little France Park as a connective landscape. This has been achieved by planning the green paths network as an integral part of the larger masterplan and strategy for the area from the early stages.

The Little France Park masterplan is also interesting in that it has incorporated Living Landscapes principles into its design. This approach will help achieve significant biodiversity and habitat benefits as a result, benefiting not just people but local wildlife and the environment too.

An additional learning point has been the way the project deals with the recent reductions in revenue available for ongoing maintenance of the active travel routes and greenspace. The green active travel routes through Little France Park have been designed and delivered conscious of the need for low ongoing maintenance, and have been retrofitted to complement and provide missing links in existing routes. This approach, combined with the fact the green active travel routes were delivered prior to some of the new adjacent housing developments, means their benefits have been felt since the start of the area's regeneration, and will be easier continue maintenance of into the future.



Green active travel path network within the Northern section of Little France Park. Leading toward Greendykes.



## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Little France Park project has already succeeded in better linking Craigmillar Castle Park with Little France Drive for those on foot or by bike, and connecting Greendykes Road and the new residential developments being built to the east of the new Little France Park. This is just the first phase of a more ambitious proposed active travel route planned for future years that would link Midlothian with central Edinburgh via the Wisp and Craigmillar Castle Park. ELGT are in the process of obtaining further funding for the next phase of this route from Little France Drive to the Wisp, and hope to apply for additional funding to secure delivery of this project in the near future.

Further development of the Little France Park parkland and masterplan continues and is expected to be complete within the next few years. As the residential developments, and additions to the BioQuarter and hospital adjacent to the parkland complete, it is anticipated that use of these green active travel routes and the parkland will increase.



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The views are beautiful [along the paths in Little France Park]. I like walking or cycling through the woodland section near Craigmillar Castle Park and then the views opening out as you come out from the trees. It's also a quieter route to the hospital and good for cyclists. I like that [...] you can cycle through the park. It's a quick route and pleasant and green too.

Jane, local resident

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I live 2 miles away. [I use the Little France walking and cycling routes] approximately once a week on my route to work. [...] [I like that the Little France Park walking and cycling routes create a] peaceful and pleasant environment. Smooth, clean, well-lit paths.

Sorrel, local resident

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Creating walking connections, Little France Park  
Photo credit: ELGT