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THIRD ADDITIONAL CIRCULATION



To: Councillor Houghton, Convener; Councillor Laing, Vice Convener; and Councillors Grant, Boulton, Cooke, John, McLellan, Alex Nicoll and Yuill.

Town House,
ABERDEEN 11 November 2021

CITY GROWTH AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The undernoted items are circulated in connection with the meeting of the **CITY GROWTH AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** to be held here in the Town House on **FRIDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2021 at 1.00 pm**. This is a hybrid meeting and Members may also attend remotely.

Members of the press and public are not permitted to enter the Town House at this time. The meeting will be webcast and a live stream can be viewed on the Council's website. <https://aberdeen.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

FRASER BELL
CHIEF OFFICER - GOVERNANCE

BUSINESS

- 7.1 Combined City and Beach Covering Report - RES/21/297 (Pages 3 - 14)
(Letters)

Should you require any further information about this agenda, please contact Mark Masson, email mmasson@aberdeencity.gov.uk, or telephone 01224 522989

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Steve Whyte
Aberdeen City Council
Marischal College
Broad Street
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AB10 1AB

10 November 2021

Dear Steve,

ABERDEEN CITY CENTRE MASTERPLAN UNION STREET POTENTIAL PART PEDESTRIANISATION

I refer to the recent release of further information and visuals outlining potential future changes to Union Street all forming part of the refresh of the Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan.

As Head of CBRE's Aberdeen office I can advise that as a company we have and continue to be very active in trying to secure retail and office occupiers for the numerous vacant properties up and down the length of Union Street. We are also regularly tasked with attempting to convince developers to acquire buildings on Union Street with a view to them then investing money to upgrade and refurbish these properties.

It is safe to say that it has been a challenge over recent years to attract new occupiers and investment to Union Street. On the retail side the best quality national operators have in the main favoured the modern covered Union Square offering, and whilst there have been the odd good quality operator take space on Union Street, the quality of new entrant has in recent years been questionable. We are also now faced with the challenge of not only having almost 50 vacant retail units but also the concerning facts that even charity shops and betting shops have been closing on the street.

It is really encouraging to see the progress Aberdeen City Council are making with the revamp of Union Terrace Gardens and in addition the bold plans for the Aberdeen Market redevelopment looking nothing short of exceptional. The prospect of having a properly pedestrianised prime section linking these two major regeneration projects is something that would completely transform the fortunes of the city centre and in my view will lead to the the general public falling back in love with Union Street. The potential of having no cars or buses on a calm tree lined avenue with new public realm, coffee shops, bars and restaurants in addition to well designed outdoor seating areas would go a long way in reversing the decline of Union Street. If this pedestrianisation was not to happen I believe this will unfortunately have a hugely negative impact on the success and experience of the new Aberdeen Market and Union Terrace Gardens.

We were recently involved in convincing a major energy company to relocate their office from an out of town location to the city centre. A large focus of our presentation was talking up Aberdeen City Council's proposals to transform Union Street, making it more pedestrian friendly with less pollution and therefore creating a far more pleasurable environment for staff to spend time and money before, during and after work. It would be a worry if the decision was made for Union Street to revert back to the

previous situation with numerous lanes of traffic and narrow pavements reducing dwell time opportunities for office staff to enjoy the city centre.

We do also receive feedback from developers that they would be prepared to commit to redeveloping some of the eyesore empty upper floors of Union Street if a more pedestrian friendly environment was created at the entrance to these buildings, instead of coming out to narrow pavements often with busy bus stops in close proximity. Extending the pavements on the remainder of Union Street would certainly help encourage developers to invest in these challenging properties.

Numerous cities across the UK and the globe have successfully made their city centre's more pedestrian friendly. You just have to read newspapers and look on social media to see this change happening more and more across progressive cities who not only realise the necessity to re-purposes their city centre but also appreciate the health and wellbeing benefits to making city centre's focussed around the priorities of the pedestrian and introducing more sustainable methods of transport. The global pandemic has given the public of Aberdeen a taster of how café culture could work successfully in the city centre and if this can become a permanent fixture on Union Street then I would certainly have more confidence in securing occupiers for the numerous vacant properties we continue to market.

This pandemic has given the city the unexpected opportunity to trial the experience of a more pedestrian friendly city centre. Whilst I appreciate there have been an element of negative feedback to the "Spaces for People" changes to the city centre, I am sure the majority of these people would change their views if this was done on a more permanent basis. Increased level of public and private sector investment will create a far more enticing, pedestrian focussed Union Street.

I therefore write in support of the proposals and hope the right decision is made by Aberdeen City Council to re-invigorate, re-vitalise and re-instate the public of Aberdeen's pride in Union Street.

Regards,

Your sincerely,



Derren McRae
CBRE - Head of Aberdeen Office



**Aberdeen &
Grampian
Chamber of
Commerce**

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10 November 2021

In 2016, the members of Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce endorsed this statement:

“We are in full support of the need to modernise and re-invent Aberdeen city centre and the Masterplan represents the best route forward. We acknowledge that there will be elements of the plan that do not meet with universal approval but we accept that this is inevitable and that we should proceed in the pursuit of the greater civic good”.

AGCC is the North-east Scotland’s leading business support and economic development organisation and one of the most influential Chambers in the UK, representing more than 1,000 organisations that collectively employ over 100,000 people. Our aims are to support our members to do better business today while working as part of a strong and ambitious regional partnership to create the conditions that will underpin the future economic strength of our region, supporting inclusive growth.

Cities are a finely balanced eco-system of retail, culture, hospitality, residential and offices with people at their heart. If any of them are out of balance, then the others are likely to fail.

Even before the crippling impact of COVID-19, UK high streets and town centres were already being hit hard by the perfect storm of out-of-town retailing and workplaces, the rise in online shopping and other changes in consumer behaviour.

The High Streets & Town Centres in 2030 report by Sir John Timpson in 2018 concluded: *Unless urgent action is taken, we fear that further deterioration, loss of visitors and dereliction may lead to some high streets and town centres disappearing altogether.*

Some forecasts at the time warned that we would lose 30% of bricks and mortar retail in the next ten years. And this was all before COVID-19 with some experts now suggesting that this timeline could be accelerated fivefold.

This has been reinforced recently in Aberdeen by the closure of Debenhams and the consultation to shut John Lewis, leaving the people of the North of Scotland with not a single department store.

Successful cities have been countering these trends with successful strategies to create exciting, cool, attractive multifunctional places that people choose to live, work and spend their leisure time. Adopting this approach, phase one of the Aberdeen city centre masterplan has delivered strongly against these objectives resulting in a number of hugely exciting additions to our public realm.



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The Marischal Square development has transformed our civic square and attracted blue chip companies to locate their offices in the heart of the city. The £34m refurbishment of Aberdeen Art Gallery has resulted in it being named Museum of the Year and it will host the British Art Show this summer.

The £28m project to bring Union Terrace Gardens back to life and the reopening of Provost Skene’s House as a museum to famous Aberdeen folk are just months away from completion. And our world class events strategy has seen the Great Aberdeen Run, cycling’s Tour of Britain and BBC Sports Personality of the Year hosted in the region. But this was just the start.

Now it’s time for the next set of projects and the international market development and the reinvention of our beach will be at the vanguard of this. They will provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to create jobs and experiences. They will provide focal points to generate footfall in and around our city. They will support moving around the city more easily, promoting health and wellbeing. And generate civic pride and confidence at a time when this has been at a low ebb across the country. Additionally, it will be the catalyst for investors to support the other ambitious projects within the next phase of the masterplan.

Decisions taken now will determine whether our city centres, places that should be the beating heart of our communities, recover strongly or become concrete deserts, museums to a bygone age. Time is of the essence and we urge you to support these ambitious proposals.

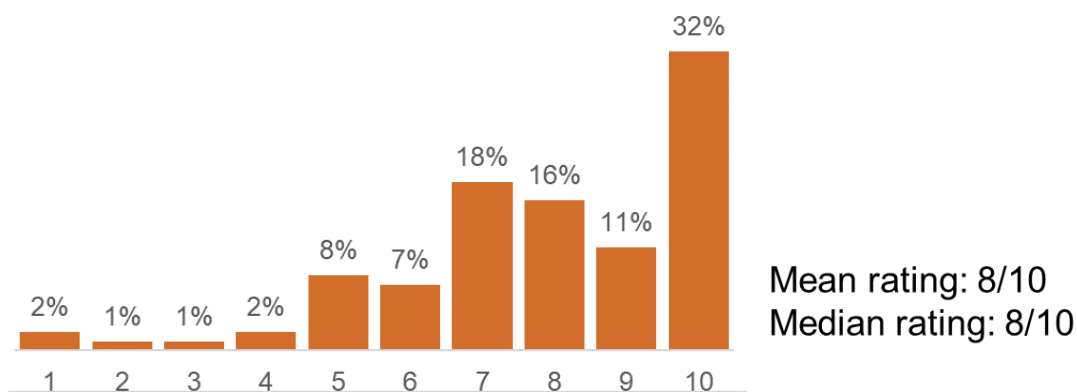
Our hope is that we can build on an already great place to live, work, study and visit with our city centre reimaged as a vibrant hub, not just for the residents of Aberdeen, but for the wider region of more than half a million people.

In turn, this will enable us to retain and attract the skilled people we need here to drive the UK’s journey to net zero through energy transition as well as underpinning the strategy of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire being a £1bn regional tourism economy within a few years.

Growth comes in various forms. Extending, broadening, heightening, developing; but the common thread is the process of increasing in size. It is a change process.

Recent Chamber research of 500+ residents undertaken by Scotpulse shows conclusively that there is an appetite for change.

In light of a changing economy, COVID recovery, and the climate emergency, what is your personal appetite to see big change projects go ahead in the region? (1 not at all, 10 absolutely)



Despite this, there are groups hell bent on sabotaging our progress. Whinging, complaining, protesting, slowing. Their default position is 'No'. 'Yeah shall not change'. It is a noisy but small minority.

Of course it's important that we take on board the view of key stakeholders to ensure the widest possible buy-in and that the final design details work for the majority but this cannot be a barrier to progress.

On behalf of our business community, we ask you to support the ambitious proposals being brought forward.

Yours sincerely



Russell Borthwick
Chief Executive

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THE M^cGINTY'S GROUP

Steve Whyte

Aberdeen City Council

Broad Street

Aberdeen

AB10 1AB

Dear Mr Whyte,

ABERDEEN CITY CENTRE MASTERPLAN - UNION STREET

I write in relation to the recently updated revisions to the Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan that are now out in the public domain. I am Operations Director of McGintys Group, an Aberdeen based hospitality business that employs 250 people locally. We started the business 12 years ago proudly acquiring our first bar and restaurant at the west end of Union Street, a venue that continues to trade to this day as "McGintys Meal An' Ale". Since then, we have expanded our portfolio over the years acquiring and investing in another 9 venues across Aberdeen. On Union Street our other venues are "The Esslemont" and "Macs Pizzeria", which are situated in the historic former Esslemont & Macintosh department store and also "The Grill" whisky bar opposite the Music Hall, Aberdeen's best known public house. We also operate "The Stag" on Crown Street and our most recent acquisition, "Under The Hammer" on North Silver Street. We have invested a considerable sum of money in this much loved local venue which sadly closed at the start of the pandemic re-opening to the public last week to positive feedback.

Given our business roots, Union Street has always been held dearly in both mine and my co-Director's hearts. There is no doubt a thriving Union Street has a positive benefit on our business, allowing the company to employ a strong local workforce and hopefully continue to expand in the future. We would like to congratulate Aberdeen City Council commitment and delivery on a number of key projects in the city centre which have helped to drive footfall, including the Marischal Square development, which gave us the confidence to bring back to life part of the former E&Ms building, the Music Hall refurbishment, The Art Gallery redevelopment and also the ongoing works to transform Union Terrace Gardens.

Despite these fantastic interventions, unfortunately Union Street has continued to face challenges as has every other High Street in the UK. The implementation of Spaces for People at the outset of the global pandemic has enabled the trial of both full pedestrianisation of the prime section of Bridge Street to Market Street, plus the opportunity to extend pavements on the remaining sections of Union Street, allowing an element of café culture to appear on our main retail thoroughfare. We have therefore for the first time had the ability to let customers sit outside The Grill, The Esslemont and Macs Pizzeria. This has been extremely well received by not only local regulars but also visitors to the city, creating a vibrancy to Union Street not experienced before. Because of the temporary nature of the arrangement, we are honest to say we did not invest significantly in these outdoor areas, however

**The McGinty's Group, 169 Bon Accord Street,
Aberdeen, AB11 6UA**

if they were to become a permanent fixture we would ensure that we invested properly in outside seating areas that compliment the Union Street streetscape.

We are firmly of the view that Union Street was in decline with the previous 4 – 5 lanes of traffic and that there is now the opportunity to totally transform the look and feel of the street by pedestrianising the prime section and extending the remainder of the pavements. Even if The McGintys Group's venues were situated in locations where it was not practically possible to offer longer term external seating areas, we would still fully support the most recent proposals as going down a more pedestrian friendly route would bring Aberdeen city centre in line with other major cities in creating that much desired café culture.

We hope Aberdeen City Council grasp this potential one-off opportunity to make long lasting positive change to our city centre's beating heart for not only the benefit of the hospitality industry but also for the people of Aberdeen, visitors to the city and future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Aitken

Alan Aitken

Operations Director

The McGinty's Group



9th November 2021

Joint letter to The City Growth and Resources Committee.

Ref. City Centre Masterplan

Dear Members of The City Growth and Resources Committee,

I write to urge you to vote in favour of the proposals being placed in front of your committee this week.

I also urge you not to be distracted by the many views, publicly made, about Spaces for People. Your decisions this week should not be influenced by what people say about the colour of cones, or the temporary measures that have been in place as a result of the pandemic. Your decisions are all about the future of the city centre in the decades to come.

City centres across the country are in real trouble. This is not a new situation and the economic impact of COVID-19, such as the loss of anchor department stores, has simply brought a long-standing challenge into sharper focus. Pre-pandemic, Union Street was a route through the city centre; a noisy and busy dual carriage-way that brought no inspiration to entrepreneurs to fill the numerous vacant retail units, no desire for empty offices to be converted to aspirational city centre living, and not enough inspiration to grow the visitor footfall.

Whilst the city's increasing number of good quality reasons to visit have been very welcome improvements, in isolation they are not enough. The environment in which we live and work has to improve if we've any chance of seeing significant and sustainable change to Aberdeen as a destination.

During the months of August through October, STR Global data shows that weekend Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) in city centre hotels grew by approximately 19% compared to the same point in 2019. This single stat is heavily influenced by transient leisure demand as pandemic restrictions eased but traveling abroad remained a challenge. It demonstrates, with the right conditions, the potential of Aberdeen as a strong destination. Hopefully we will not see the conditions that drove this particular demand again, so a repeat of these exceptional numbers is unlikely without the right interventions to create the right environment.

I urge you to consider how the plans before you will attract improved retail and hospitality offerings, be a primary location for commercial lettings and an attractive place to live in. All these are needed to positively influence inbound tourism and improved footfall and dwell-time.

Please demonstrate your vision for what Aberdeen needs to look like for decades ahead and lay the ground work for that vision with a vote in favour.

Kind regards

Frank Whitaker
Chair
Aberdeen City & Shire Hotels Association

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Good morning,

Further to my submission on behalf of the Aberdeen City & Shire Hotels Association in relation to this week's vote on the City Centre Masterplan, I'd like to add a point specifically on behalf of the business that I run, situated on Justice Mill Lane.

The West End of Aberdeen needs more positive interventions alongside the central section of Union Street, Queen Street and the beach front. Whilst the CCMP proposals will no doubt improve the city offering as a destination, as my letter states, I remain concerned that a qualitative imbalance has been created.

The location of The Park Inn by Radisson has strengths in terms of the commercial activity at this end of town, but that becomes secondary when considering the desire of transient guests to be around Union Square and Marischal Square. The hotel's strategic approach to pricing has had to change to grow market share because of this.

There have been plans for years to improve this area with a proposal to part-pedestrianise Justice Mill Lane to Windmill Brae. There are concerns that removing temporary one-way measures on Justice Mill Lane will return the street to an accident waiting to happen. This concern is shared by tenants of the Silver Fin and Capitol office developments, who have garage and delivery access onto Justice Mill Lane. These concerns have been raised several times with Council officers and directly to Sandra Macdonald at one of Aberdeen Inspired's West End Business Network meeting. These local interventions will deliver safety, not just at commuting pinch-points, but for the night time economy as well. The street down to Windmill Brae will be a much safer place at night, and much more welcoming for visitors.

Businesses in this part of town are looking to you to recognise that the environment in which we operate has to improve. The first step would be to formalise the one-way system on Justice Mill Lane as part of the lifting of Spaces for People measures. This should be followed by a second step to progress plans to part-pedestrianise the route down to Windmill Brae.

I am available to any member of the Committee who would like to discuss anything further, you'll find my contact details below.

Thank you



FRANK WHITAKER, General Manager

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