

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	11 October 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan
REPORT NUMBER	COM/23/304
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne
REPORT AUTHOR	Nigel McDowell
TERMS OF REFERENCE	21

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval of the Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan as the George Street Masterplan being the Council's 'place' strategy for the George Street area.
- 1.2 Council of 14 December 2022 approved the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan for public consultation in early 2023 with instruction to report the outcomes of the consultation, including any revision to the Draft Masterplan, by December 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

- 2.1 Review the Consultation and Engagement Report (Appendix 1) which records and analyses the public and stakeholder consultation and engagement undertaken, and notes that the consultation responses have shaped the Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan.
- 2.2 Note the contents of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report, and the non-technical summary report (Appendix 5 & 5a), whose findings are recorded in, and have given direction to, the content of the Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan.
- 2.3 Approve the Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan (Appendix 2) as the George Street Masterplan being the Council's 'place' strategy for the George Street area.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background

- 3.1 The City Growth and Resources Committee of 12 November 2021 instructed that public and stakeholder engagement be undertaken in early 2022 on the

future of the George Street area because of the closure of John Lewis (Norco House) and defined the focus area within the city centre boundary between the Bon Accord Centre, Gallowgate, Spring Garden / Maberly Street and Charlotte Street with part of George Street at its centre.

- 3.2 An online consultation to scope interest in the preparation of a Masterplan for the area took place on the Council's Citizen Space consultation hub from 7 February 2022 for four weeks until 7 March 2022 and sought opinions on the 'strengths', 'weaknesses', 'opportunities' and 'threats' as a place health-check.
- 3.3 A summary of the 297 responses received was presented to Council of 29 June 2022 indicating a desire for positive change to be brought forward to support the area. Officers were instructed to report a draft George Street Mini Masterplan to Council of 14 December 2022, which was approved for public consultation commencing in early 2023. (Appendix 4 - Draft George Street Mini Masterplan)
- 3.4 Public consultation and engagement took place from March 2023 with three strands of activity 1) **an online Citizen Space survey** – posing key questions on sections through the draft Masterplan, 2) **direct stakeholder invitations to be involved** – by email notification and follow-up briefing presentations, and 3) **an organised programme of engagement with children and young people** - based on the theme of a 'sense of place' within the streets and spaces of the Masterplan area. In addition, traders were invited to display posters regarding the consultation. At the end of the consultation and evaluation programme an open evening presentation meeting took place on 21st September with stakeholders to share the findings of the public consultation and engagement as well as to discuss and conclude the revisions before the Finalised Draft Masterplan was re-presented to Council.

Summary of Consultation and Engagement Programme and Responses

- 3.5 **Citizen Space Survey** - An online survey ran on Citizen Space for 6-weeks between 17 March and 28 April 2023. The survey provided a summary context to the Draft Masterplan and was structured by posing questions to key topics throughout the Draft Masterplan, page numbered for easy reference, as well as offering opportunity for any further comment. ACC Officer contact details were provided to offer discussion and guidance on the Draft Masterplan as well as to offer hard copy of the Draft Masterplan and survey questions, etc.
- 3.6 The 102 survey responses were received from a range of user groups: Pupil/Student/Education (19), Resident (4), Local Authority Officer (1), NHS Grampian (2), Police Officer (1), Prefer not to say (58), Professional / Business (14), Tertiary Education (3). Most of the questions posed on the key sections and topics through the Draft Masterplan generated a supportive response to their principles. Appendix 1 – Draft George Street Masterplan Consultation and Engagement Report provides full returns, evaluation and revisions made.

Response Summary

- 3.8 **Question 1** - The proposed place '**Vision**' – '**George Street Connected! – a vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood at the heart of reinvention**' gained 73% support because the George Street area is part of the city centre and

needs to be connected to the city and region for its success, as well as functioning as a neighbourhood entity, however concern was raised on the use of 'jargon', budget, and likelihood of implementation etc.

- 3.9 **Question 2 – The 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats'** appraising the built environment aspects of the Masterplan provide the basis for regeneration projects that seek to make positive change particularly within the existing streets, spaces and redevelopment opportunities. The question asking if you agree with the appraisal gained 80% support endorsing the Draft Masterplan's baseline findings, though concern was raised principally around 'place' management with issues cited such as the 'dying high street', traffic management and being inclusive in project delivery.
- 3.10 **Question 3 – Invited opinions on the principles of promoting more Active Travel and Greenspace** to create a more diverse, inclusive, and attractive George Street area gained 65% support with a further 12% in general agreement but having some reservations. The reservations centered on the ability to maintain the projects proposed, where financial investment would come from, the prospects of anti-social behaviour taking place in greenspace, the lack of greenspace, as well as concerns regarding the need for more inclusive design and greater certainty on vehicular movement and accessibility.
- 3.11 **Question 4 – Destination not a Through-Route** Applied a crucial ambition of the City Centre Masterplan in creating a city centre that is a destination by reducing opportunity for through-routing for private vehicles in the Masterplan area. The question gained 53% support with a further 17% in support but with some reservations, and 30% not in support with the consideration that there is too strong an emphasis on improving the quality of pedestrians' space rather than a balanced consideration. Through the consultation period the traffic management modelling has been revised to provide what is now considered the optimum reduction in through-routing in the area, to enable proposals for significant place and environmental improvements for the streetscape redesign to be considered. These projects would provide the opportunity for improved accessibility for everyone, introduce street-greening, sustainable urban drainage, more equitable use of space and ultimately create a more attractive environment and a distinctive place unlike any other within the city centre. (Appendix 3).
- 3.12 **Question 5 – Sought opinion on the six transformational regeneration Projects** proposed which gained 75% support, with 25% of those citing some reservations and with 7% stating that they were unsure or did not support the projects. Concern on budget for delivery and maintenance was cited, and that prioritising pedestrians over private vehicles is a considered risk to business success, repeating concerns raised to Question 4. Responses also encouraged 'quick win' projects, that our heritage of George Street's historic granite buildings is recognised as a strong asset, and that with more outside seating and uses and that premises opening hours could be extend. In addition, encouraging evening activity/economy and the well-considered use of colour and greening to give a new 'sense of place' to the area were considered important.
- 3.13 **Question 6 – Norco House** Illustrated redevelopment scenarios for the currently vacant Norco House building, formerly John Lewis, which explored

new uses and forms of redevelopment for the site. The scenarios gained 80% supporting the identified need for positive change as an 'area of influence', for redevelopment with a variety of uses, to support the wider George Street area, though 18% were unsure or disagreed. The scenarios have been brought out of the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan appendices, distilled, and presented within the 'Transformational Project's' section to encourage appropriate redevelopment that would capitalise on the array of amenities and business opportunities within and around the Masterplan area, and act as a regeneration catalyst. The site could also provide the only opportunity for significant greenspace which is identified as lacking from the Masterplan area to support recreational needs, community greenspace and a wider range of activities such as the provision of communal recycling facilities, etc.

- 3.14 **Question 7 – Invited Further Comments** and generated a wide range of considerations: questioning the budget to deliver projects, questioning place management, encouraging opportunities street markets/food, more outdoor seating, seeking more greening and the consideration for better health and wellbeing opportunities, encouraging more independent business into the area, creation of areas for safe socialising and improved street infrastructure. A social ask raised is for increased support of marginalised groups to use the area and to try to strengthening support for existing community groups to take forward project ownership. In addition, a 'place branding' project between NESCol and George Street partners in 2019 was referenced and remains relevant.
- 3.15 **Stakeholder Invitations** - In addition to the ACC Press release advising that the online survey was taking place for 6 weeks between 7 March and 28 April 2023 21 separate emails were forwarded to key stakeholders advising that the survey was live and to offer in-person meetings to discuss and record any aspect of the Draft Masterplan stakeholders wished to make. The invitation yielded eight written responses, five face to face meetings, and eight stakeholders did not respond.
- 3.16 All the stakeholders who responded welcomed the production of the Draft Masterplan and endorsed the 'Vision' and high-level project direction as well as expressing interest in being involved as specific projects are approved to be taken forward in delivery. Some of the responses indicated that there is scope to improve capacity building within key stakeholders to enable them to be fully engaged in the delivery of the projects working toward 'George Street Connected'. Comments were also received in seeking a clearer more structured Masterplan, and that in welcoming the principles of the projects acknowledged that greater detail was needed for their implementation.
- 3.17 **Children and Young Persons' Engagement** - At the outset of the City Centre Masterplan (CCMP) refresh, and subsequent CCMP and Beach Development Framework, and as priority project progress children and young people have played a central role in project identification and development. Within and adjacent to the Draft Masterplan area the students of North-East Scotland College (NESCol) and Roberts Gordon's College are estimated to generate c.11,000 daily visits to the area, and there are 4 primary schools and 1 secondary within the wider area of George Street. The children and young person's engagement was envisaged to yield their perspectives on the George Street area to influence the Draft Masterplan, as well as adding to awareness

and learning of the built environment, and hopefully develop their future study topics and involvement in civic life.

- 3.18 An engagement programme with NESCol, Robert Gordons College and Skene Square and Sunnybank Primary Schools was developed on the theme of 'sense of place' – using open questions such as - what does it feel like to be in the area? what brings you to the area? what would hold your interests here? and, what improvements would you like to see made? Etc.
- 3.19 The students at NESCol and at Robert Gordon College undertook accompanied walks of the area and considered place-making and how specific places could be made better. Although apparently not hugely familiar with the area, the students from both institutions looked in detail at the constraints and opportunities associated with the four chosen locations and prioritised projects accordingly. A 'deep clean' featured highest on their priority list along with tree planting, as well as 'parklets' (being a popular idea in George Street), a lighting net and information points/wayfinding.
- 3.20 The primary school children also considered 'place' and utilised a happy/sad persona, 'Georgie', to help articulate how they felt about the specific locations and what those places could become. Some of the classes had accompanied walking tours whilst others were able to watch a virtual tour of the area. The priorities for the primary children, many of whom live in or near the Masterplan area, focused on more colour/art, planting and trees and better lighting and up-lighting to make the streets and spaces more attractive.
- 3.21 Outcomes from engagement with the children and young people include a stark observation that few currently use the George Street area to any great extent but recognise that the place has a feeling of vibrancy and that the proposed Vision captures this. When given specific areas to focus on the predominant request was for the area to be cleaner with aspirations for greater CCTV coverage, better street lighting and street-redesign with street trees greening and opportunities for play and recreation sought, the use of more colour in the area and better lighting. *"Georgie' did not like 'endless grey walls, weeds, parked cars, and uncomfortable seating, but did like fun shops, murals, trees, bike-stands and plants'.*
- 3.22 The engagement and consultation with children and young people has added greater diversity and broadened horizons to engagement. Their reactions and recommendations for place improvement have been incorporated and the findings of all the stakeholder groups generally concur. Feedback from NESCol and all the schools taking part was extremely positive and it is hoped that the children and young people felt included and know that their thoughts and opinions were heard to help shape the Masterplan. It is hoped that they benefited from project-based learning on their doorstep by bringing parts of their curriculum to life as well as encouraging their awareness, confidence, and importance in engaging with, and directing on matters, which impact on everyone.

Strategic Environmental Assessment - Environmental Report

- 3.23 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires public bodies to undertake a strategic environmental assessment when preparing plans which

are likely to have a significant environmental effect, either positive or negative upon delivery. A Screening Report, undertaken following Council's approval of the Draft Masterplan for consultation in December 2022 and hosted on the Scottish Government SEA Gateway informed the 'Consultation Authorities' of Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Water and Nature Scot on the intention to prepare an Environmental Report on the Draft Mini-Masterplan to determine the level of 'significant impact' and to give direction to the emerging proposals within the Finalised Draft Masterplan. The statutory consultees provided a positive review of the Environmental Report (Appendix 5 & 5a)

- 3.24 Public Notice on the Environmental Report - Following receipt of the Consultation Authorities responses, incorporated into the Environmental Report and Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan, a statutory four-week public notice was undertaken from 9th August – 10th September 2023 inviting expressions of opinion on the content of the Environmental Report hosted on Citizen Space. No responses were received and a Post Adoption Statement following approval of Finalised Draft Masterplan, as the George Street Masterplan, is to be prepared and issued to the Scottish Government Gateway informing the statutory consultees as to how their responses have shaped the Finalised Draft Masterplan.

Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan

- 3.25 Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan - As a result of the consultation findings the Draft Masterplan, which was arranged on the City Centre Masterplan themes of 'People', 'Economy' and 'Place', was re-organised with the focus on 'Place' as the basis to growing the local 'Economy' and therefore better support 'People' within an improved residential and mixed-use activity area. This foundation approach is in accordance with, and emphasises project delivery, to realise the Local Outcome Improvement Plan Vision '*Aberdeen is a place where all people can prosper*'.
- 3.26 In reflection and response to the engagement and consultation undertaken the Finalised Draft Masterplan has acknowledged and distilled the foundations of place-based analysis, maintained its **Vision**, and proposes a series of place based 'transformational projects' to realise the vision and create a more successful, sustainable, and distinctive George Street within the city centre. A greater emphasis, with more developed project details, that focus on specific locations, are presented with the ethos of 'accessibility for all'.

Monitoring

- 3.27 The established monitoring protocol for the City Centre and Beach Masterplans will be followed to ensure accountability and transparency as well as to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategies, projects and actions outlined within the Masterplan in delivery.
- 3.28 The Integrated Impact Assessment, drafted in tandem with the engagement programme responses, evaluates the principles advocated and the likely outcomes of delivering the projects within the Finalised Draft Masterplan, as well as reviewing the engagement and consultation methods, and inclusion of

the communities' findings, to shape the Masterplan. The Integrated Impact Assessment will continue to provide a monitoring framework to project delivery.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from approval of the Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan as the Masterplan for the area.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The George Street Masterplan, strategically allied to the City Centre and Beach Masterplans, provides the basis of all future decision making to and within the environment of the Masterplan area, and would be the Council's strategy for investment and change to signal confidence and commitment by approval of the 'transformational projects'.

5.2 The Masterplan provides a strategic direction, and as a material consideration, to enable projects to progress toward implementation, many of which will be subject to statutory consenting processes to ensure continuing stakeholder and interested party engagement as well as meeting local and national policy and standards.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 In accordance with the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 the content of the Draft Masterplan has given rise to the production of an Environmental Report which as identified and assessed the significant environmental impacts of the Draft Masterplan in so far as the strategic detail will allow. The conclusions from the national statutory consultees, see Section 3 above, are that the delivery of the Masterplan would give development direction and see significant positive environmental impacts to the Masterplan area when the projects re delivered. The potential benefits for the flora, fauna as well as human residential, recreational, and business needs, if the place opportunities are realised, are significant. All the consultees have indicated a willingness to be involved as project details are developed. The Environmental Report, and its non-technical summary are Appendix 5 and 5a).

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *Considering controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?

Strategic Risk	Not delivering the Masterplan and its projects	Full programme of works to be developed, funding approvals to be in place at key stages	H	Yes
Compliance	Experimental Traffic Regulation Order / Traffic Regulation Order challenges	Manage through ongoing engagement and communication programme	M	Yes
Operational	Sufficient capacity of resources within Councils teams and external providers to meet programme objectives	Development of the transformational projects programme Resource review ongoing and identification of support through the Project Management Officer	M	Yes
Financial	Budget pressures due to current market volatility and wider project delivery strategies	This will be more fully expressed in project Business Case evaluations.	H	Yes
Reputational	Establishing a foundation to make the identified changes and for project delivery in the area, following significant investment in the preparation of the Masterplan	Maintain Masterplan Vision as part of the LOIP delivery. Continue stakeholder engagement and agree project detail and implementation Clear and regular communications and reporting	H	Yes

Environment / Climate	<p>Air quality improvement</p> <p>Enabling greater active travel opportunities</p> <p>Balancing place and movement need and modes of travel</p> <p>Opportunities to establish local micro habitats for flora and fauna</p>	<p>Reduction in vehicular through routing</p> <p>Maintaining and augmenting public transport accessibility</p> <p>All streetscape projects founded on 'place greening' and better use balance</p> <p>Specifications with a 'local first' basis</p>	L	Yes
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8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>Council Delivery Plan 2023-24 - Creating the Masterplan accelerates the Council's 'journey of change' for the George Street area in response to the climate change crises, the cost-of-living crises, and the socio-economic impacts on the traditional 'high-street' supporting the sustainable neighbourhood.</p> <p>Masterplan preparation and delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlocks community action by strengthening and rebalancing the relationship between local government and citizens – through the engagement programme. • Lead council and cross-sector partnerships with a focus on outcomes to work across borders and boundaries – the Masterplan provides the foundation of projects which will require partnership working. • Enables a functioning, trusted local and central government relationship to both understand the local context and translate ambitious national aspiration into effective local action for communities – in the delivery of the Masterplan's projects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs for people’s needs, by responding to the needs, expectations and wants of citizens – as a result of the engagement programme. • Tackles inequality and meet the needs of all citizens, recognising the diversity of communities and playing a proactive role in tackling inequality of outcome and embedding rights-based approaches – in the engagement programme and as projects develop.
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<p><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></p>	
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<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>A Prosperous Economy</p> <p>The Masterplan focuses on ‘place’ based investment to redress the needs of the area for the 21 Century as the foundation to grow the local ‘economy’ and better fulfil the area potential for its ‘people’. The place has a distinct identity functioning as a local neighbourhood entity within the city centre.</p> <p>The Masterplan does not directly refer to the Outcomes 1-3 (poverty, unemployment, upskilling) but would support creating a more attractive better-connected place setting the foundation for an improved economy.</p>
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<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The production of the Masterplan has engaged and consulted any interested person and organisation on its development to reflect the needs, ambitions, and place vision through a series of transformational projects.</p> <p>The Masterplan supports Outcome 7 Child Friendly City which supports all children to prosper and engage actively with their communities by 2026. This has its foundation in the children and young person’s engagement programme undertaken.</p> <p>Supports Outcomes 10-12 Adults – by open calls for involvement by any interested party to be involved in the initial consultation through to Masterplan development so that people can shape their immediate environments and be involved in delivering place change.</p>
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<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The Masterplan is written specifically with a current evaluation of all ‘place’ aspects within and affecting the study area and proposes six transformational projects that are considered crucial to the future of</p>
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	<p>the 'place'. Delivery of the projects will address specific targets which include: Supports Outcome 14 Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by 42.5% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate Supports Outcome 15 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026.</p> <p>The Masterplan recognises the current Climate Crises and advocates best sustainable practice in all the projects proposed within what is a built and brownfield urban environment.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>The report supports the priorities in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) investment in infrastructure, regenerating our city centre, unlock development potential, improve the deployment of low carbon transport, to enable Aberdeen to realise development opportunities in the City Centre Masterplan.</p> <p>The Masterplan supports the National, Regional and Local Transport Strategies, particularly the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy, which prioritises the needs of those walking, wheeling, and cycling above other road users, and the 4 pillars identified in the recent Regional Transport Strategy, Nestrans 2040: Equality, Climate, Prosperity and Wellbeing.</p> <p>The Masterplan also supports the Aberdeen Active Travel Plan and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, both of which seek to improve conditions for people walking and cycling in Aberdeen, particularly to, from and within the City Centre, through the provision of more and safer infrastructure. Fundamentally this is expressed with the intention of limiting through-routing traffic and proposing new streetscapes within the existing street sections.</p> <p>Measures to reduce unnecessary vehicle traffic in the City Centre will support the Air Quality Action Plan, Climate Change Plan, Net Zero Action Plan and Low Emission Zone by contributing to emissions reduction.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IIA Stage 1 and 2 Assessment accompanies this report.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/A
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix 3 – Traffic Testing Report• Appendix 5 - Strategic Environmental Assessment- Environmental Report• Appendix 5a – SEA Environmental Report Non-Technical summary

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 City Growth and Resources Committee 12 November 2021 – Combined City and Beach Covering Report [Combined City and Beach Covering Report - Covering Report.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)

(Item 2.6.4 - Note the current position regarding George Street and continued uncertainty surrounding the future of the former John Lewis building and undertake public and stakeholder engagement in early 2022 and report back to this committee in June 2022.)

[Decisions 12th-Nov-2021 13.00 City Growth and Resources Committee.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)

- 10.2 Council 29 June 2022 – City Centre Masterplan Update Report - [CCMP Update Report to Council.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)

(Item 2.7 - Note the outcome of the recent engagement exercise on the future of George Street (Appendix E) and instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to report back a Mini Masterplan for the George Street to Full Council in December 2022.)

[Decisions 29th-Jun-2022 10.30 Council.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)

- 10.3 Council 14 December 2022 – Draft George Street Mini Masterplan Report

[George Street Mini Masterplan FINALREPORT.pdf \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](#)

(Item 2.1 - Approves the content of the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan and notes the engagement undertaken with stakeholders to date.)

(Item 2.4 - Instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to report the outcomes of the public consultation on the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan back to Council by December 2023, including any recommended revisions to the Draft Mini Masterplan.)

[Decision - George Street Mini Masterplan - COM/22/291 \(aberdeencity.gov.uk\)](https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/decision-george-street-mini-masterplan-com/22/291)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Consultation & Engagement Report
- 11.2 Appendix 2: Finalised Draft George Street Masterplan
- 11.3 Appendix 3: Traffic Testing Report
- 11.4 Appendix 4: Draft George Street Mini Masterplan 14 December 2022
- 11.5 Appendix 5 & 5a: SEA Environmental Report & Non-Technical Summary

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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