

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance and Resources
DATE	6 August 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Castlegate Public Realm Update
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/25/178
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Alan McKay
REPORT AUTHOR	Sandy Beattie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the final design and layout for public realm improvements in the Castlegate.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Approves the design and layout of the public realm improvements as detailed in Appendix A; and
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer – Capital, following consultation with the Chief Officer – Commercial & Procurement Services, to negotiate and execute contracts for delivery of the construction programme in line with the previously approved total project budget as detailed in paragraph 4.1, reporting progress through the Chief Officer – Capital's regular capital programme monitoring reports to this committee.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Castlegate public realm improvements are a key component of the City Centre and Beach Masterplan. The general layout and design principles were agreed by Council at their meeting on 7 February 2024 (ref RES/24/039). Further, the Finance & Resources Committee on 7 August 2024, agreed the spatial principles to be adopted in the space, including how the area is serviced and managing active travel (ref CR&E/24/219).

Summary

- 3.2 The final design takes into account a number of challenging factors including, but not limited to, accessibility, hierarchy of space and movement, historic

environment, servicing, tourism, events, business needs and residents amenity.

3.3 Engagement has taken place through first of all an “On-Boarding Session” in late August 2024, with youth, community, business active travel and transport groups involved in setting the key principles of design based on the spatial arrangement agreed at Finance & Resources Committee in August 2024. This was followed up with further sessions involving the Disability Equity Partnership, Cycle Forum and Castlegate businesses.

3.4 The layout (see Appendix A) is structured in such a way to ensure that all the factors in 3.2 above are considered and managed in a significantly better way than at present. These are broadly summarised below :

- Clear and unobstructed footways adjacent to buildings
- Clear service and cycle arrangements (future proofed pending commitment to deliver Union Street East and Castle Street public realm improvements)
- Significant greening of the space to:
 - Provide sustainable drainage solutions
 - Enhance air quality
 - Improve biodiversity
 - Encourage active use of the space
 - Provide health benefits
- Clear service movement and access
- Hostile Vehicle Mitigation measures
- Flexible events space
- Seating, both outdoor café and for general use
- Incidental play
- Enhanced setting for the Mercat Cross (including restoration work to the structure)
- Enhanced setting and access to seating for the Gordon Highlanders Memorial
- Improved feature lighting for both decorative and wayfinding purposes

3.5 There are a number of features in the design that have been worked on collaboratively with the Disability Equity Partnership, captured in the associated Integrated Impact Assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

- Clear footways
- Use of street furniture, planters etc to define movement spaces
- Surface finishes to aid visually impaired to navigate via stick
- Selection of plant species to avoid falling broadleaves
- Regular and varied height seating with choice of back and arm rests

3.6 As previously agreed at Finance & Resources Committee in August 2024 vehicle movement and active travel are managed in the space via the design and layout. This will be supplemented by enforcing timed vehicle restrictions. The intention is that the existing Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) will be updated under existing delegations to reflect current best practice and success of

implementation will rely on appropriate stewardship of the space after completion.

The process of behavioural change has already started with businesses in the area after a traffic count highlighted the main issues affecting the space. Business owners at the Castlegate have all indicated a willingness to work with the Council and ensure that service timing and deliveries are appropriate and allow the space to be safely accessed by all.

- 3.7 Events in the space are an important part of the history and character of the Castlegate and the design reflects this. The area to the west of the Mercat Cross is designed to be the focus of events of a range of sizes. Street furniture, planters etc in the area are removeable to enable larger events as required.

The Gordon Highlanders Statue is relocated to the south side of the Castlegate, with seating positioned opposite to improve the setting and support those paying their respects. Representatives of the Gordon Highlanders have been involved in the design and a letter expressing their support is attached as Appendix 2.

Space is available for on street market trading, subject to either delegated powers held by Corporate Services – Governance or Licensing Committee decision where appropriate. Space is also available for outdoor seating for cafés, restaurants etc in the area, subject to Café Permit applications to the Roads Authority being approved and, where relevant, other regulatory requirements such as licensing approval and planning permission.

- 3.8 Pending approval of this report, the Chief Officer – Capital, following consultation with the Chief Officer – Commercial & Procurement Services, will negotiate and execute contracts for delivery of the Castlegate construction programme. Financial close will follow with a site start expected by the end of August 2025. This is subject to satisfactory returns for all work packages.

Project Financial Close	w/c 11.08.25
Site start:	
Advance Works (Utilities diversions etc)	w/c 25.08.25
Main Works (Construction)	Q3/Q4 2025/26

Construction start will be dependent on completion of advance works and is expected to take around 12 months.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The 5 Year General Fund Capital Programme (2025/26 – 2029/30), approved at Council on 5 March 2025, allocates a total £13,118,000 over the next three financial years to the delivery of the project. A total of £662,000 costs have been incurred in 2024/25 for design development and extensive survey work.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are likely to be several access rights to properties, lanes and pends which will require to be taken into consideration during construction work.
- 5.2 As project proposals from the Masterplan report progress, they will be examined and managed within the professional scope of property / conveyancing industry accepted standards, ensuring all due diligence exercises and pre-contract enquiries are complete and satisfactory.
- 5.3 Any work that is recommended to property not owned by the Council will require effective dialogue and the owner's consent before it can commence. Other local authority consents, such as planning permission and listed building consent, may also be required for any necessary works to buildings.
- 5.4 All changes to vehicular movement on the road network are subject to statutory processes.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The City Centre and Beach Masterplan has been screened through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process and the consultation authorities have confirmed that no Environmental Report specific to this overarching Masterplan is required. Individual plans, programmes and strategies falling out of the Masterplan will be considered individually, as will any requirements for project-specific Habitat Regulations Appraisals (HRAs).
- 6.2. The public realm design includes the introduction of planting encouraging biodiversity in the city centre and contributing to clean air targets.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Not delivering CCMP and Beach projects	Full programme of works will be developed, project funding included in capital programme	L	Yes
Compliance	Statutory approvals will be sought where necessary	Manage through ongoing delivery programme	L	Yes

Operational	Sufficient capacity of resources within Councils teams to meet programme objectives	Forward planning through CCMP and Beach project delivery programme Resource review ongoing and augmented support through the Project Management Office of Hub North Scotland Ltd	M	Yes
Financial	Budget pressures due to current market volatility	Robust budgets established including significant optimism bias and inflation risk. Independent monitoring process established. With PMO early supply chain mitigations action plan established across the programme	M	Yes
Reputational	Delivery	Agree and implement projects, clear communications, articulate vision	M	Yes
Environment / Climate	Air quality improvement Active travel Local material supply	Incorporated into project proposals. Early engagement underway with material suppliers	M	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	<p>Supports the delivery of Economy Policy Statement 4 – Increase city centre footfall through delivery of the City Centre Masterplan. 1. – Continue to maximise community benefit from major developments.</p> <p>Vibrant City- We will work tirelessly to make Aberdeen a more attractive place to live, work, report and visit with a vibrant cultural offering.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim to make Aberdeen a premier destination for festivals, productions, conferences, bands and events.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Supports Outcome 1 - 10% increase in employment across priority and volume growth sectors by 2026.

Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>Supports Outcome 7 - Child Friendly City which supports all children to prosper and engage actively with their communities by 2026.</p> <p>The report references active travel and cultural participation which support the delivery of Stretch Outcome 10. Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer by 2026.</p>
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	<p>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>
Regional and City Strategies	<p>The report 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>It 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.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	N/A
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 RES/24/039 City Centre Streetscape Update
<http://councilcommittees/documents/s153355/240207%20City%20Centre%20Update%20report%20to%20Council%20RES%2024%20039.pdf>
- 10.2 CR&E/24/219 Castlegate Public Realm Update
<https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s160081/Castlegate%20Public%20Realm%20Update.pdf>

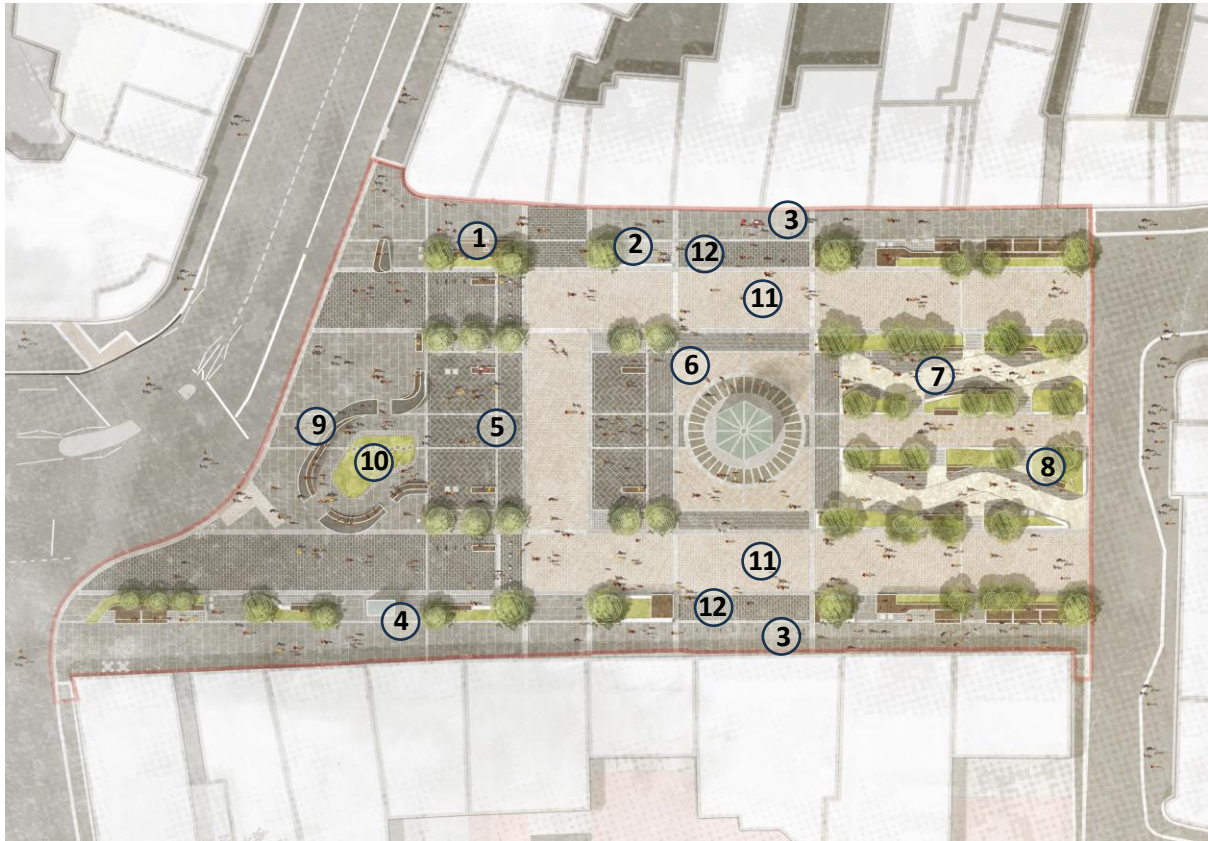
11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 : Castlegate final layout and images
- 11.2 Appendix 2 : Letter of support from Gordon Highlanders

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Appendix 1 : Castlegate final layout and images



1	Spill out seating associated with established restaurants and bars.
2	Areas that accommodate seating and resting points set within surface mounted raised planters
3	3m wide clear and unobstructed footways adjacent to the buildings
4	Relocated Gordon Highlanders Statue with seating and planting adjacent, creating an enhanced setting
5	Open and flexible space, west of the Mercat Cross capable of accommodating formal and informal gatherings
6	Natural stone paving, provides an enhanced setting to the Mercat Cross
7	Key routes through the gardens, with seating, incidental play, lighting and opportunities for artwork and interpretation
8	Areas of planting, providing shade, shelter and seasonality
9	Sculptural 'serpentine' bench, providing a backdrop to the Castlegate and opportunities for informal play and gatherings
10	Rain gardens, offering sustainable drainage, greening and seasonality
11	Inner square through route that provides permeable access for pedestrians and cyclists; secondary function as a servicing route
12	Laybys accommodating service vehicles, deliveries and refuse collection



View from 'serpent bench'



Aerial view from King Street



View from Justice Street



View from Citadel

Appendix 2 : Letter of support from Gordon Highlanders

The Gordon Highlanders Museum and Regimental Trust Fund, St Lukes, Viewfield Road, ABERDEEN, AB15 7XH
Tel: 01224 311200 Fax: 01224319323 Email: museum@gordonhighlanders.com

From Colonel (Retired) CPC Sloan OBE LLB
Executive Chairman



Sandy Beattie
Masterplan Manager
Aberdeen City Council
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23 July 2025

RELOCATION OF GORDON HIGHLANDERS STATUE, CASTLEGATE

The Gordon Highlanders are strongly supportive of the proposed relocation of The Gordon Highlanders Statue from its current position in the Castlegate to its proposed new location closer to the South West corner of the Castlegate.

We are particularly appreciative that our requirement to have sufficient space around the statue so that it can continue to be used as a focus for commemorative events has been met. We also consider that the new location is the most suitable of the alternatives that were proposed.

I am also happy for this letter of support to be made public if this is considered appropriate without any further reference to me.

Yours sincerely

