

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	City Growth and Resources Committee
DATE	25 August 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	City Centre Masterplan Review
REPORT NUMBER	RES/21/179
DIRECTOR	Steven Whyte
CHIEF OFFICER	-
REPORT AUTHOR	Sandy Beattie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1.5, 3.2, 3.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents an update by officers on progress of the 2015 City Centre Masterplan (CCMP) review and provides recommendations on what could be prioritised in the short term to support initial economic recovery within the City.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Note that the review of the City Centre Masterplan 2015 is not an exercise to replace or supersede the CCMP, but rather look at a number of priority intervention areas, within scope;
- 2.2 Approve the City Centre Masterplan 2015 Review and project recommendations as detailed in Appendix A Section 3 and acknowledge the projects that have been completed since the approval of the CCMP in 2015, that a number of others are well underway, and that others are not within the control of Aberdeen City Council at this time and require partnership working with other stakeholders;
- 2.3 Note the high level of response to the recent public engagement exercise on the future of the City Centre, the priority projects which scored the highest as part of this exercise, and the responses received on what it would take to attract people back into the City Centre in the short-term (Appendix A Section 2) and instruct the Director of Resources to publish the results online;
- 2.4 Note the indicative visioning exercise for current City Centre interventions areas on Union Street, the West End, Castlegate, and Schoolhill/Upperkirkgate and instruct the Director of Resources to develop these indicative works to detailed design stage including costing, delivery timelines and consultation with key stakeholders, residents and traders in the area for:

- (a) Redesign of Union Street Central streetscape, complete with consideration of the associated changes to the surrounding transport network to facilitate the project as envisaged in Appendix A section 12,
- (b) Union Street West and West End as envisaged in Appendix A section 12,
- (c) Union Street East and Castlegate (linked to accessibility studies and design work for the Beach Masterplan) as envisaged in Appendix A section 12,
- (d) Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate as envisaged in Appendix A section 12,
- (e) Undertake key stakeholder engagement to inform the design for each of the above projects,

and report progress to the City Growth and Resources Committee on 3 November 2021;

2.5 Agree that George Street be subject to its own public engagement exercise, and instruct the Director of Commissioning to report back progress to the City Growth and Resources Committee in November 2021;

2.6 In light of the instruction to proceed with detailed design for the redesign of Union Street Central streetscape, to support businesses as we emerge out of the pandemic and noting correspondence from the Scottish Government (dated 15 July 2021) in respect of continuation of special measures to enable the erection of temporary buildings by the hospitality sector, and that guidance on such has been extended to 31 March 2022, instruct the Chief Officers of Capital and Operations and Protective Services to:

- (a) maintain current arrangements for the approval of temporary outdoor trading proposals until 31 March 2022,
- (b) reopen Bon Accord Street after the current extension of outdoor seating lapses at the end of March 2022, subject to ongoing considerations regarding the programme of works surrounding South College Street which require earlier reopening,
- (c) Union Street, Belmont Zone and West End Spaces for People interventions to remain until a permanent design and transport mitigation is agreed,
- (d) The use of green spaces, car parks, parks, roads, etc. by private businesses for outdoor trading to cease from the end of March 2022 or to be regularised through the appropriate processes, and
- (e) Instruct the Chief Officers of Operations and Protective Services, Governance, Corporate Landlord and Strategic Place Planning to explore options to align the consenting process for businesses who

may wish to make permanent any existing temporary outdoor trading, including any necessary management, leasing arrangements and upkeep of public spaces, and report these back to the City Growth and Resources Committee in November 2021;

- 2.7 Agree that the public transport network is the key to maximising mass sustainable movement of people to and from the City Centre, and that changes to Union Street (and any others) which (pre-COVID 19) supported bus services, will require mitigation to protect and enhance the bus experience as part of the COVID recovery plan as well as the City Centre Masterplan review, and that this accords with the recent Bus Partnership Fund bid (subject to a separate report to this Committee); and
- 2.8 Instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning to develop a Traffic Management Plan to support the City Centre Masterplan Review in consultation with the bus operators and in collaboration with the Chief Officers of Operations and Capital and report this back to the City Growth and Resources Committee in November 2021;
- 2.9 In response to issues raised by the public consultation simulator, instruct the Director of Resources to:
- (a) Undertake a visual building condition survey and recommend improvement measures, including costs, constraints, methodologies and an implementation programme for all properties on Union Street;
 - (b) Develop detailed design proposals to create a permanent café culture in the Belmont Street and Back Wynd area in consultation with key stakeholders, residents and traders in the area;
 - (c) Investigate the possibility of Council-owned land allowing permanent outdoor areas to promote café culture,
 - (d) Installing outdoor seating outside Aberdeen Art Gallery as a first phase delivery of café culture.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 3 February 2021, the Council's City Growth and Resources Committee agreed to review the 2015 City Centre Masterplan (CCMP) and instructed the Director of Resources and the Head of Commercial and Procurement Services to develop a specification for a review of the Masterplan to incorporate appropriate surrounding areas, including the area known as the Beach, in consultation with the Co-Leaders and the Convener of the Capital Programme Committee, reporting progress back to the Committee on 11 May 2021.
- 3.2 On 11 May 2021, the City Growth and Resources Committee instructed Officers to progress with the Review, undertake public consultation on a

series of proposed interventions and what would attract people to the City Centre, develop a series of visioning exercises for streetscape and public realm projects in the City Centre and report back. At the same Committee, further instruction was given relating to the Beach and Aberdeen Market, both covered by separate reports to this Committee.

4. PROCESS

- 4.1 In order to understand current public views and reflect the changing socio-economic context since the approval of the 2015 Masterplan, a public engagement exercise entitled “The Future of Aberdeen City Centre and the Beach” was undertaken.
- 4.2 Consultation was carried out online in the form of a simulator model developed by Council officers, based on the simulator successfully employed for the Local Outcome Improvement Plan previously. Running for 3 weeks from 12 June – 02 July 2021, the simulator returned a total of **7697** responses.
- 4.3 Of these responses, 7610 provided demographic information and 2753 responses included “free text” in one or more of the comments boxes provided. It has been noted by Delib, the company providing the simulator software, that this is one of the most successful exercises ever undertaken in terms of number of responses. The number of respondents far exceeds the generally accepted figure of approximately 2,000 in order to gain a sample size of representative value.
- 4.4 Of the responses received, 71% were from participants in Aberdeen City, 23% from Aberdeenshire and the remaining 6% from Moray, Angus, the Highlands and further afield. Responses by gender were split approximately 60/40 between male/female, with a small proportion (0.06%) either unassigned or preferring not to say. The majority of respondents were in the 25-54 age brackets.
- 4.5 There were few (less than 1%) respondents in the under 18 age group, which is likely due to the timing of the consultation at the end of a challenging academic year. In order to address this, it is recommended that any future stakeholder engagement is also targeted through our schools and education networks to encourage young people to participate in designing the future of their city.
- 4.6 Details and analysis of the outcomes are contained in Sections 2.0 and 14 of Appendix A. All free text comments received are available on request and, subject to approval of recommendation 2.3 of this report, all consultation feedback will be made available online. The top ten issues returned are highlighted in the table below:

Top Ten Priorities	
1	Union Street as the Heart of the City
2	Make outdoor café culture in the Belmont Street area permanent
3	Focus on building maintenance and upkeep for Union Street
4	Beach as location for a new stadium
5	More trees, flowers and green spaces on Union Street
6	Pedestrianised central section of Union Street (Market Street to Bridge Street)
7	Improve connections from the Beach to the City Centre
8	Remove street clutter on Union Street
9	Castlegate - make more of the space
10	Improve connections from the City Centre to the Beach

4.7 Hub North Scotland (HubNS) were engaged by the Council to act as the Project Management Office for the procurement and management of the necessary design, consultancy and technical work to develop proposals for various streetscape interventions and public realm works, develop the Aberdeen Market proposals and develop technical studies for the Beach Masterplan.

4.8 HubNS undertook a robust procurement exercise following the City Growth and Resources Committee in May 2021, with issue of a Request for Proposals in late May, a Bidders' Conference held online (4 June 2021) and subsequent evaluation of submissions in June. Multi-disciplinary teams for the 3 main workstreams of City Centre Streetscape Improvements, Aberdeen Market and the Beach Masterplan were appointed to commence work on 5 July 2021.

4.9 Weekly progress meetings have been held and a series of workshops with Officers and technical leads for each workstream were undertaken in late July. The results of the simulator are being used to inform the design development of each of the various work packages. Further information of the visioning work for the various streetscape packages is contained in Appendix A, Section 12.

5. PROGRESS UPDATE

5.1 Since the City Growth and Resources Committee in May where Council approved the short, medium and long term CCMP Review Action Plan, a number of key short-term workstreams are in progress or are now complete. Specific instructions from the Committee are updated in the table below:

Instruction	Progress Update	Lead
Facilitate the re-opening of existing CCMP projects, in line with Scottish Government guidance; and to prioritise non-capital	Aberdeen Art Gallery – open Maritime Museum – open Provost Skene House – open October 2021	Corporate Landlord

Instruction	Progress Update	Lead
works across the Council's building stock in order to increase aggregate demand in the local economy	<p>Events 365 Programme will see Tour of Britain start in the city on 13 September 2021</p> <p>British Art Show (#BAS9) open at Art Gallery and included in wider marketing of "Rediscover Aberdeen City Attractions" campaign with traffic element to the site performing above forecast. BAS 9 a featured event on VisitAberdeenshire site</p> <p>Working with VisitScotland on promoting Maritime Museum, Provost Skene House and new exhibition activity in off season (eg Zandra Rhodes) and a 'city region twitter takeover' to begin w/c 23 August 2021</p> <p>Social media campaign 'geo targeting' audiences in Edinburgh. Glasgow and Dundee, and local promotion</p>	
Develop design works for current City Centre interventions on the whole of Union Street, West End, George Street and Schoolhill	<p>Visioning work underway for Union Street, West End and Schoolhill.</p> <p>George Street to be subject to separate exercise, pending engagement with John Lewis and the Bon Accord Centre.</p>	Director of Resources
Accelerate, where possible, the completion and opening of CCMP projects under construction within the next 12 months ensuring a focus on the realisation of the Council's community benefit policy.	<p>Project delivery reports for Union Terrace Gardens and Provost Skene's House projects to be reported to the next Capital Programme Committee scheduled for 22 September 2021.</p>	Capital

Instruction	Progress Update	Lead
Review and evaluation of all existing powers available to Council in order to drive the return of footfall to the city centre and incentivise city centre living	Policy and procedures review undertaken (see Appendix A Section 5.0)	Governance, Strategic Place Planning, City Growth
Develop and undertake engagement exercise with the public, all appropriate partners and stakeholders to seek their views on the City Centre Review	Public consultation simulator model complete 12 June – 02 July 2021. Detailed stakeholder engagement to follow pending approval of visioning design work. See Section 2.0 of the CCMP Review (Appendix A)	Director of Resources
CCMP plays a part in ensuring a “just transition”, as envisaged by the final report from Scottish Government’s Just Transition Commission	Work continues to support the economic transition of the city region economy away from fossil fuel and gas and towards low carbon energy as part of the long term regional economic strategy. The City Centre Masterplan and Local Development Plan reflect the competitive advantage that is being sought through the opportunity to cluster businesses.	City Growth
Consider the possibility, post pandemic, of a more fundamental change to how the Aberdeen City Centre operates in the future	Medium Term	Director of Resources
Review the CCMP objectives and their workstreams.	See Section 4.0 of the CCMP Review (Appendix A)	Director of Resources
Use the CCMP Review to integrate further “smart city thinking” into our medium-term plans to develop and undertake engagement exercise	Medium Term	City Growth, Comms and Marketing Manager
Use the CCMP review and the Local Development Plan to ensure that the ambition to secure sustainable	The adopted LDP sets the overall framework for future development. Approved in June 2021, it highlights	City Growth

Instruction	Progress Update	Lead
inclusive economic growth by attracting businesses operating in energy transition or low carbon sectors	specific opportunities to attract new inward investment with an energy transition zone policy in relation to land and sites in the immediate vicinity of Aberdeen Harbour south expansion, and its proximity to Scotwind seabed licensing sites. An expression of interest for a regional freeport for Aberdeen City & Peterhead has been submitted to maximise these opportunities and the wider city centre.	
Develop bids for potential submission to various UK and Scottish Government programmes	Complete and update provided in Section 7 - Financial Implications below.	Director of Resources, City Growth
Review the City Centre Living Strategy and informed by the CCMP review bring forward Aberdeen Planning Guidance to support the City Centre in line with the Local Development Plan	A Brief for producing an evidence base for an updated City Living strategy has been prepared and specialist advice is currently being sought.	Strategic Place Planning

6. SPACES FOR PEOPLE

- 6.1 Further to the instruction from City Growth and Resources on 24 June 2021, and the subsequent move to Level 0 of the Scottish Governments Covid route map, work has begun on removing the interventions in George Street, Rosemount and Torry. The future of the remaining interventions, i.e. those in the City Centre and at the Beach, were to be reported back in the context of the City Centre Masterplan Review (CCMP), specifically those elements of the reviews dealing with Union Street and the Beach. This is outlined within Section 11.0 of the Review of the 2015 Council approved CCMP (Appendix A).

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 As can be seen from the CCMP 2015 Review (Appendix A) a significant amount of work has been undertaken to demonstrate what may be possible for the future of the City Centre. There are key actions for Aberdeen Market which will be covered under a separate report to this Committee. With regard to streetscape design development, it is recommended that Union Street Central be prioritised to move to detailed design and stakeholder

engagement to support the development of not only the Market site, but to ensure connectivity to Union Terrace Gardens.

- 7.2 The remaining streetscape visioning works require to be developed further and a full programme of stakeholder engagement, detailed design and delivery is to be developed in tandem with a detailed traffic management plan. This will also require taking cognisance of existing committed work relating to a City Centre Low Emission Zone (LEZ) and the Bus Partnership Fund.
- 7.3 George Street was not included in the current visioning exercises due to the uncertainty during the period from May-August 2021 over the future of the John Lewis building. More discussion is also required with the Bon Accord Centre on their future plans. It is therefore recommended that a localised public engagement exercise is carried out in light of the John Lewis/Bon Accord Centre ongoing appraisal.
- 7.4 Following the encouraging response from the public consultation simulator, and pending agreement of the recommendations in this report, it is essential that key stakeholder engagement is carried out as design proposals are developed to inform detailed layouts. An extensive stakeholder engagement plan pertinent to each project is currently under development.
- 7.5 The priorities raised by the public through the simulator focussed on Union Street as the heart of the city and building maintenance, Belmont Street café culture and the Beach as a location for a stadium. The latter will be considered as part of ongoing technical work related to the Beach. Union Street visioning has been carried out, but to supplement that work, and address concerns raised through the consultation, it would be prudent to undertake a building condition survey for Union Street properties, identify maintenance improvements, costs and develop an implementation plan. In conjunction with the expressed wish to make café culture permanent, officers should investigate the possibility of Council-owned land allowing permanent outdoor areas to promote café culture. As a potential early intervention in this regard, consider installing outdoor seating outside Aberdeen Art Gallery as a first phase delivery of that café culture.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council Budget meeting on 10 March 2021 outlined a funding commitment totalling £150M from the General Fund Capital Programme over financial years 2021/22 to 2025/26 to ensure the Council transforms the City Centre and the Beach area.
- 8.2 The Council will facilitate the next phase of design works with the Hub North Scotland Limited and the supply chain of current contractors who will undertake works relating to two or more workstreams allowing lower cost. However, this does mean that at this stage the work packages cannot be split between projects so to continue with the design work a total estimated cost for the business case works, for ALL projects recommended to be taken

forward, is £1.95 million for the City Centre projects. On completion of the next phase contractors will split their costs between the various work streams

- 8.3 The UK and Scottish Government are making considerable sums of funding available that is seeking to support “shovel-ready” schemes that can be immediately implemented to aid economic recovery. Officers have recently applied to the Levelling up Fund seeking £20m. Bids are currently being assessed and outcomes will be shared in due course. It is expected that investment decisions will be made by the UK Government for this funding round by Autumn 2021. A request for information on progress with the application has been made and it is hoped that a verbal update can be made to Committee.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 In order to fully understand land ownership patterns, it will be necessary to compile up to date information on land and building ownership, leases, agreements etc that may affect projects in the CCMP. This work is now underway and will dovetail with the Union Street condition survey output.

10. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	Risks inherent in not addressing the changing circumstances in the City Centre will have a significant effect on the delivery of our City and Regional economic strategies	M	Reprioritise masterplan objectives and delivery programme as set out in Appendix A to this report.
Compliance	None so far identified with this report	L	Continue to monitor throughout the review
Operational	Resource capacity for our staff involved in the review	H	To date Hub North Scotland have supported the review and provide project management support
Financial	It is expected that there will be emerging financial	H	Financial implications for the Council

	<p>implications as a result of this paper being approved, particularly around where best to support recovery.</p> <p>There may be funding risks regarding the Bus Partnership Fund grant award, particularly around demonstrating continued partnership working.</p>	H	<p>in terms of city centre recovery and programme delivery will be identified through the review</p> <p>Continued positive and constructive collaboration with bus operators, Aberdeenshire Council and Nestrans – partners with this Council in the North East Bus Alliance.</p>
Reputational	Not proceeding with the recommendations of the review could have significant reputational damage for the Council as a “place leader”	M	Taking appropriate action in the short term will assist in building confidence in the city.
Environment/Climate	Environment and climate implications may potentially be in danger of being undermined in favour of short term economic gains	M	Any risks will take into account the Council’s own Net Zero targets. This is discussed in Appendix A to this report.

11. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	<p>Supports the delivery of Economy Policy Statement 4 – Increase city centre footfall through delivery of the City Centre Masterplan.</p> <p>1. – Continue to maximise community benefit from major developments.</p>

Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Supports Outcome 1 10% increase in employment across priority and volume growth sectors by 2026
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Supports Outcome 7 Child Friendly City which supports all children to prosper and engage actively with their communities by 2026
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	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
Regional and City Strategies	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

12. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Equalities & Human Rights Impact Assessment	Neutral Impact – full document available to view here.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	DPIA Screening Questions completed. Neither a brief DPIA or full DPIA is required at this stage.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/strategy-performance-and-statistics/city-centre-masterplan>

Report to City Growth and Resources 11 May 2021

Committee Decisions 11 May 2021

<https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/g7688/Decisions%2011th-May-2021%2014.00%20City%20Growth%20and%20Resources%20Committee.pdf?T=2>

14. APPENDICES

Appendix A: CCMP Review

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