

Steve Whyte  
Aberdeen City Council  
Marischal College  
Broad Street  
Aberdeen  
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