



**Aberdeen &
Grampian
Chamber of
Commerce**

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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.

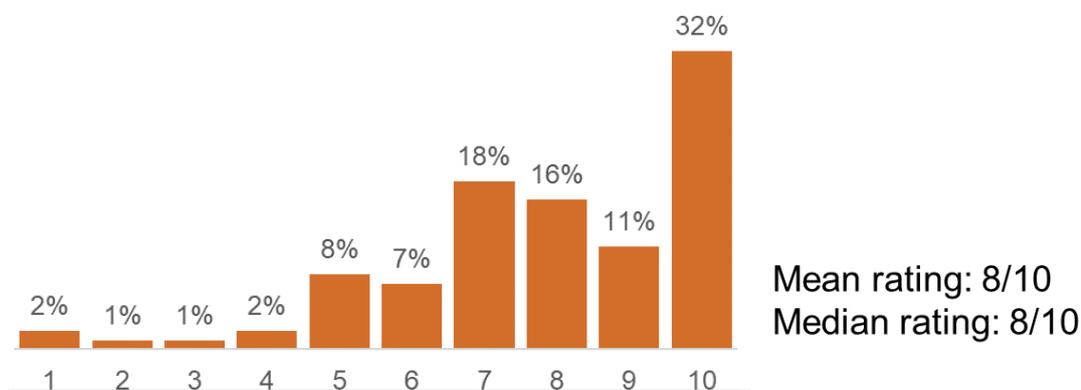
Our hope is that we can build on an already great place to live, work, study and visit with our city centre reimaged as a vibrant hub, not just for the residents of Aberdeen, but for the wider region of more than half a million people.

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