



9th November 2021

Joint letter to The City Growth and Resources Committee.

Ref. City Centre Masterplan

Dear Members of The City Growth and Resources Committee,

I write to urge you to vote in favour of the proposals being placed in front of your committee this week.

I also urge you not to be distracted by the many views, publicly made, about Spaces for People. Your decisions this week should not be influenced by what people say about the colour of cones, or the temporary measures that have been in place as a result of the pandemic. Your decisions are all about the future of the city centre in the decades to come.

City centres across the country are in real trouble. This is not a new situation and the economic impact of COVID-19, such as the loss of anchor department stores, has simply brought a long-standing challenge into sharper focus. Pre-pandemic, Union Street was a route through the city centre; a noisy and busy dual carriage-way that brought no inspiration to entrepreneurs to fill the numerous vacant retail units, no desire for empty offices to be converted to aspirational city centre living, and not enough inspiration to grow the visitor footfall.

Whilst the city's increasing number of good quality reasons to visit have been very welcome improvements, in isolation they are not enough. The environment in which we live and work has to improve if we've any chance of seeing significant and sustainable change to Aberdeen as a destination.

During the months of August through October, STR Global data shows that weekend Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) in city centre hotels grew by approximately 19% compared to the same point in 2019. This single stat is heavily influenced by transient leisure demand as pandemic restrictions eased but traveling abroad remained a challenge. It demonstrates, with the right conditions, the potential of Aberdeen as a strong destination. Hopefully we will not see the conditions that drove this particular demand again, so a repeat of these exceptional numbers is unlikely without the right interventions to create the right environment.

I urge you to consider how the plans before you will attract improved retail and hospitality offerings, be a primary location for commercial lettings and an attractive place to live in. All these are needed to positively influence inbound tourism and improved footfall and dwell-time.

Please demonstrate your vision for what Aberdeen needs to look like for decades ahead and lay the ground work for that vision with a vote in favour.

Kind regards

Frank Whitaker
Chair
Aberdeen City & Shire Hotels Association