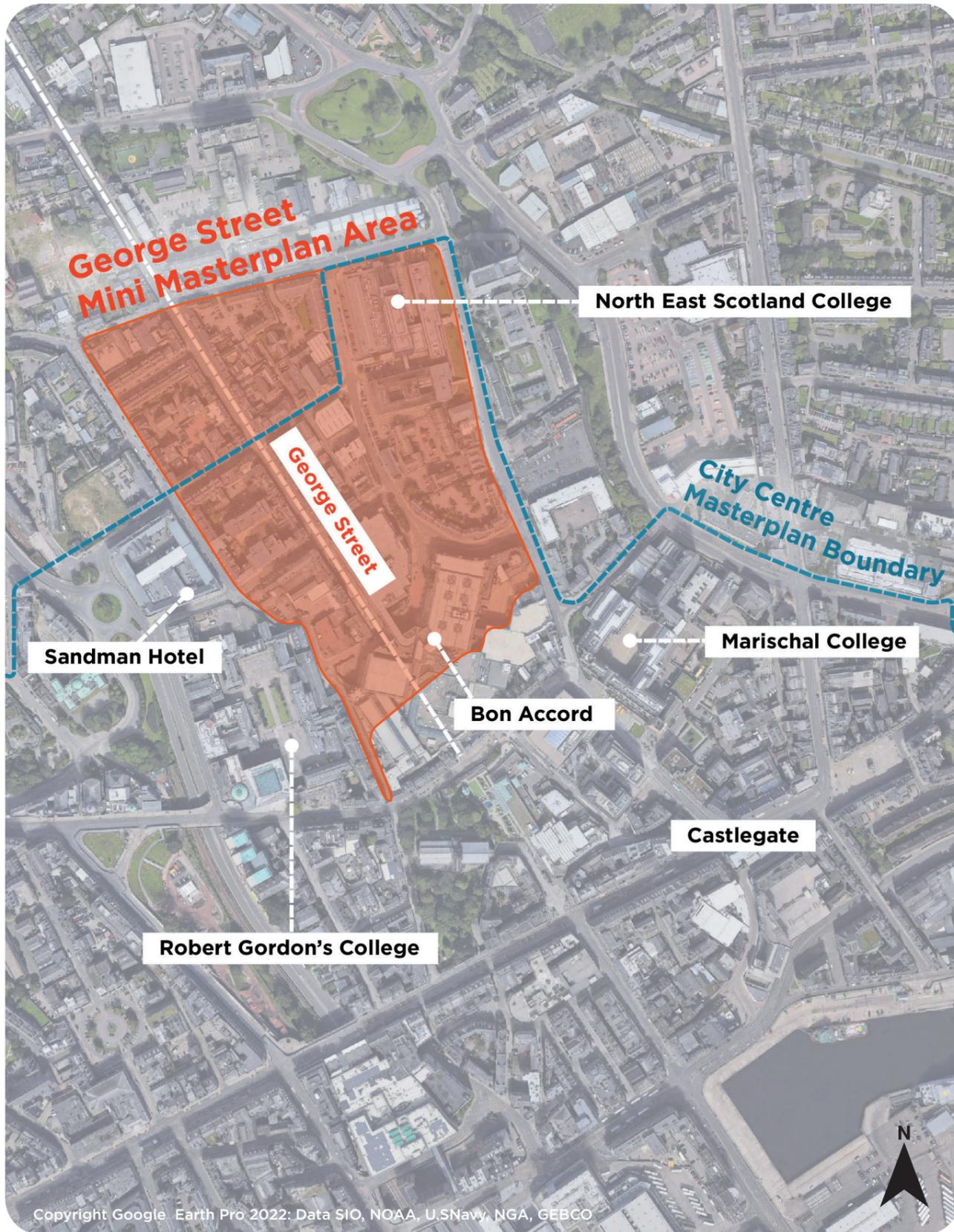


# George Street Mini Masterplan

## Consultation Analysis

June 2022





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# 1. Introduction

This report has been prepared by Optimised Environments Ltd. on behalf of Aberdeen City Council. It sets out the key ideas which should be taken into account for future masterplanning work within the George Street Mini Masterplan area of the city centre, based on suggestions and themes that arose through a public engagement exercise which took place between February and March 2022.

## Introduction to George Street

The Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan is currently undergoing a review exercise. Within the boundary of the City Centre Masterplan sits George Street. George Street is a vital part of the city centre with a diversity of uses which give the area its own distinct character. It is therefore a significant area of consideration for the wider masterplan.

## Purpose of this report

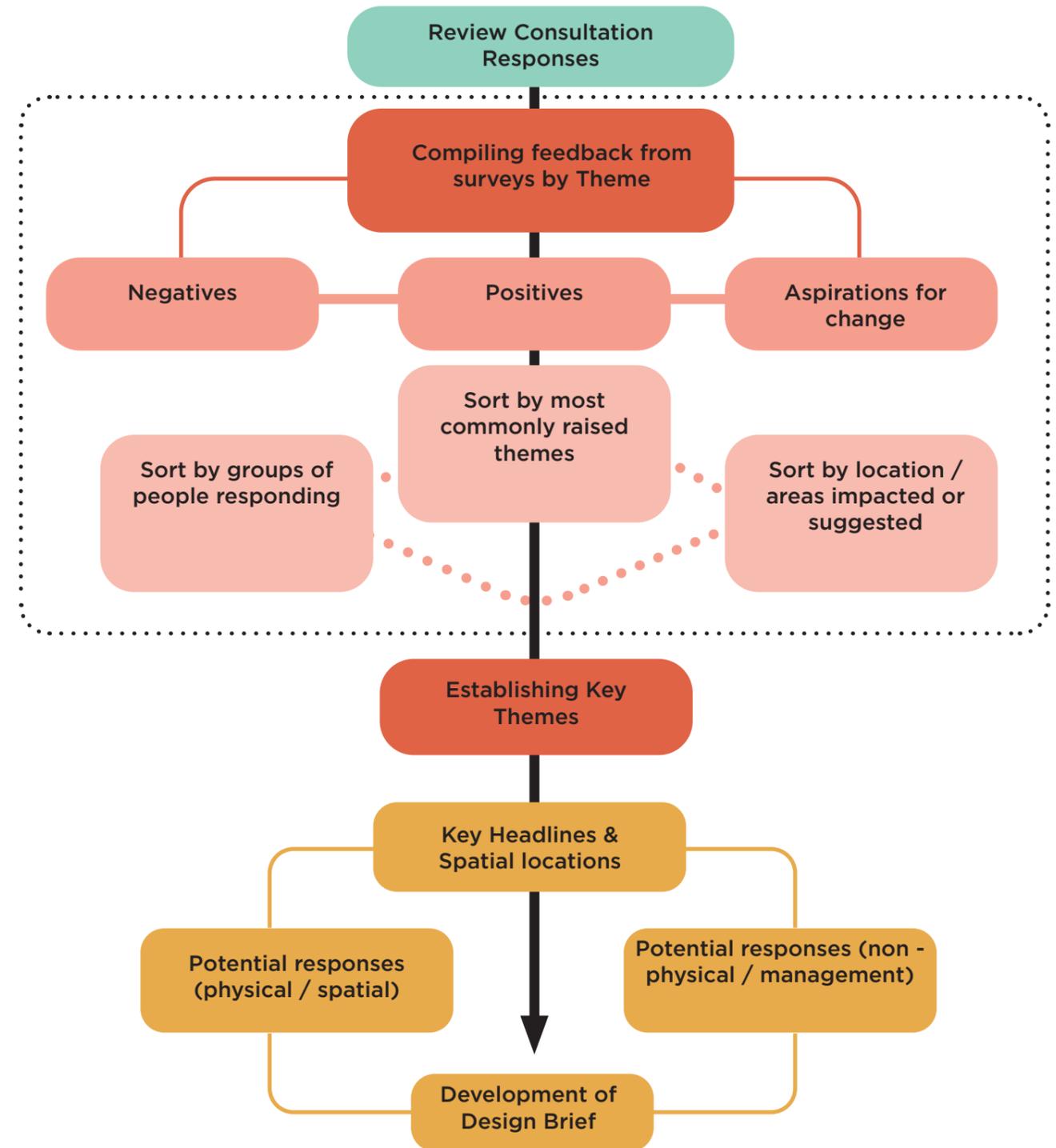
A comprehensive engagement process has been carried out by Aberdeen City Council, to understand local stakeholder and community members views and aspirations for the George Street area. The report also seeks to establish potential areas for intervention which could be addressed through the Mini Masterplan for the George Street Area, as part of the wider Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan.

The aim of the consultation process was to encourage people to share ideas and experiences of George Street and to ensure that these formed part of any future proposals for the area. The consultation exercise also invited comment on the area's key issues, it's strengths and perceptions of proximity to the city centre, in order to establish a picture of how the area functions on day to day basis and how the local and surrounding community use and interact with the place.

## Who should use this document

This document is intended to be read and understood by those closely linked to the George Street area. It aims to communicate key themes in a way that is accessible and engaging.

It could also be used as a general design brief in the future development of George Street. Future design proposals and ideologies should respond to the key themes identified within this document.



## 2. Engagement Feedback Summary

This section summaries the most reported strengths, weaknesses and aspirations for change in the feedback provided from the questionnaires.

Section 3 of this report further details and interprets the feedback from the consultation exercise.

Three questions were asked as a tool to provoke thoughts and ideas from participants. The questions were broad and qualitative and looked to understand people's general impressions of the place. The questions were:

- What do you think are the strengths / good aspects of the area?
- What do you think are the weaknesses / poor aspects of the area?
- What would you like to see changed in this area?

In addition to this, a further question was asked to establish people's understanding of how George Street relates to the rest of the city centre:

- Do you think of the George Street area as part of, and connected to, the rest of the city centre? Why do you feel this way?

The responses to this question largely suggested the area felt disconnected from the city centre. Of all the participants who responded, 41% of those believed that the disconnectedness was due to the severance caused by the John Lewis building and the Bon Accord Centre.

However, looking more closely at the data of the 46 respondents who live in the area, 59% felt that the George Street area was part of the city centre.

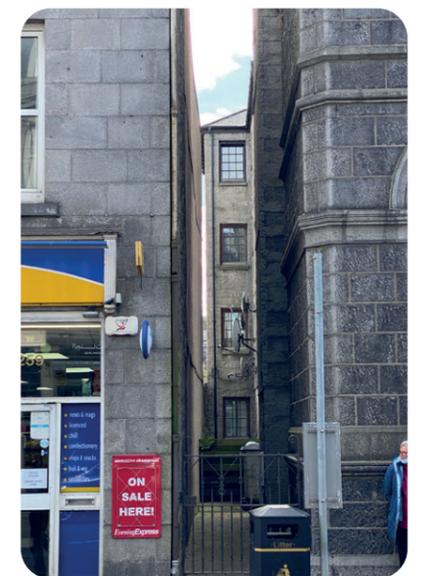
Feedback from the consultation questionnaire included **39% positive responses** towards George Street and **61% negative responses**



"I think it would be an excellent street to encourage smaller independent shops to open rather than all the 'chain' shops. It could be made into a friendly welcoming street if some of the shop frontages were refurbished. At the moment it feels a bit run down which is a shame... There could be quite a variety of goods sold there as well as a baker and a grocer. All independent..."



"...I think because some of the shops leading from Union Square to George Street are closed it doesn't flow well, therefore you either don't go or feel it's a separate trip. If there were more shops or restaurants etc leading to George Street it would all flow and you'd be more likely to continue onto the street..."



"It's not especially clean, it is frequented by a lot of substance abusers, which makes it a rougher area to live in which doesn't exactly entice you in..."



## 2. Engagement Feedback Summary cont.



### Most reported strengths from the engagement

- The most reported word or theme was around **community**. This relates to the offer of **local business** and some respondents had a **sentimental connection** to the area.
- The **traditional architecture** of George Street was commonly reported with the John Lewis building and stone buildings providing a distinct character.
- A large number of responses reported the **diversity** and **multicultural** offer of George Street as a key strength.
- Of the positive feedback, a common theme was seeing the **potential** of George Street and how welcome change in the area would be.
- **Location**. General comments were made on the location of the area within the city centre, being close to **retail** and leisure offers as well as being easily accessible by **pedestrians**.
- The **mixed use** of the area was raised as a strength throughout the feedback.
- A smaller number of responses commented on the **cleanliness** of George Street and the **street art**.

### Most reported weaknesses from the engagement

- **General safety, maintenance and security**. Many people are concerned about **anti-social behaviour** and **crime rates** in the area and feel **unsafe** walking through at certain times of day.
- Although a number of responses commented positively on the retail offer of George Street, the quality of the **retail offer** was seen as a weakness alongside **vacant properties**.
- There were a number of general comments on the overall **aesthetic** of the area needed improving due to; **foul smells, dirty façades, litter**.
- **Traffic** was raised as a concern in the area, with comments being raised on **double parking** and **uneven pavements**.
- The area **lacks green spaces** which are easily accessible.
- A smaller number of responses highlighted **seagull nuisance** as a concern in the area.

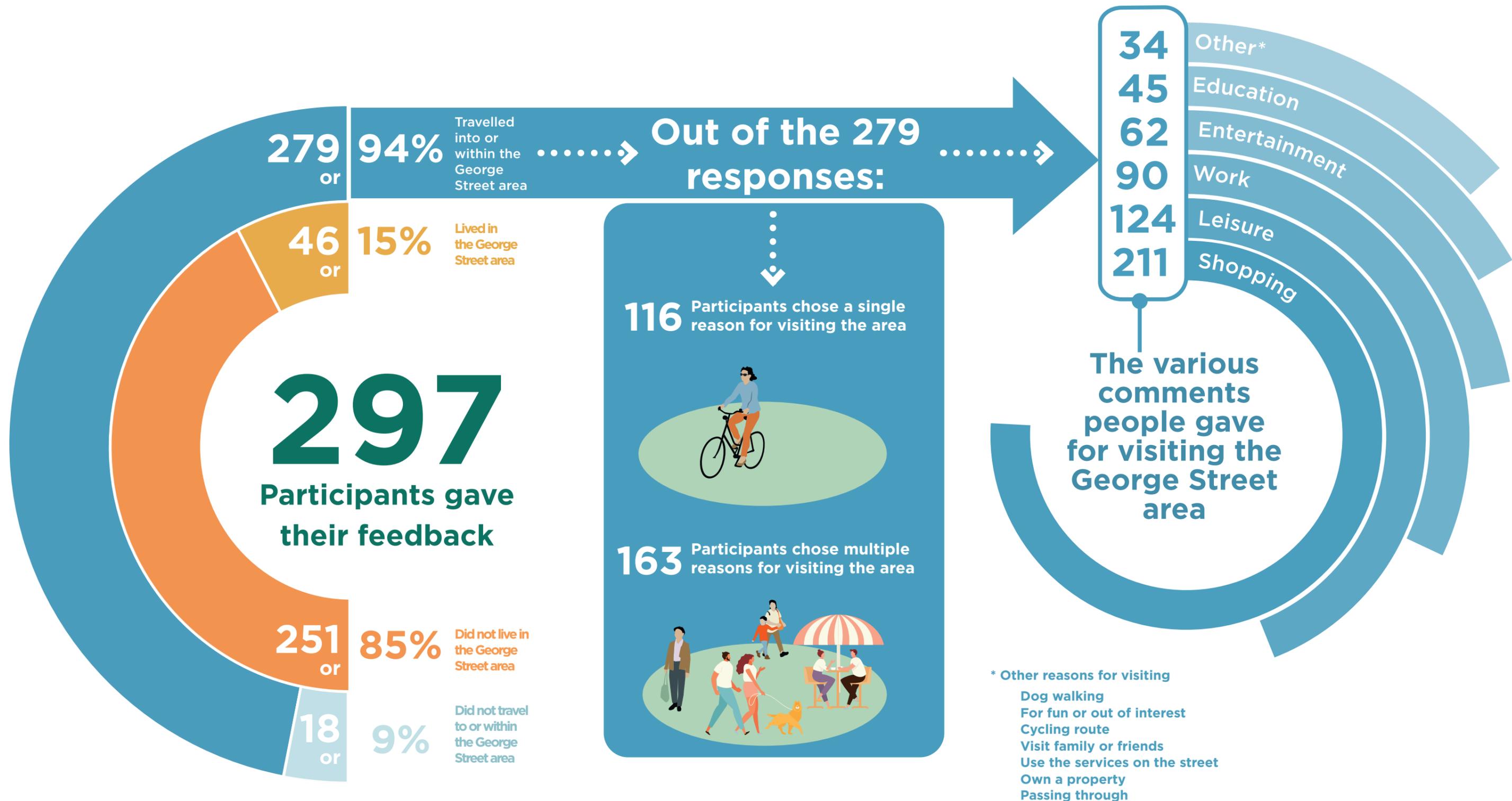
### Most reported future aspirations from the engagement

- Despite a larger number of negative perceptions towards George Street, the feedback received welcomed future change to the area.
- Public realm aspirations included: boosting **pedestrian space**, increasing the **cleanliness** and **modernising** the overall aesthetic of the area.
- The strength of the community has been identified in the feedback, and there are aspirations for this to be further enhanced through **entertainment, activities** and **housing facilities**.
- Transport movement through the area was raised through both strengths and weaknesses, and also brought up in aspirations for change. As a means of tackling the issues, it was mentioned that better **traffic management** could be implemented as well as better **transport links**.
- Increasing the **retail options** within the area with **cafes** etc was identified as an aspiration
- It was mentioned that **controlling crime** in the area would improve the **safety** of the area and also encourage more visitors and users.
- All of the above would ultimately help to **attract more footfall** into George Street.

### Most reported opinions on whether George Street area is part of and connected to the rest of the city centre

- A larger number of responses felt that the George Street area was disconnected from the city centre due to a **lack of activities, vacant shops** and an overall **run-down** aesthetic. **Unclear access points** also led to the feeling of **poor connectivity**.
- Those who did feel connected to the city centre thought this was due to its **proximity to Union Street** as well as **access to the Bon Accord Centre**.
- The area's location on a **main bus route** and **proximity to the university** also created a sense of connectivity to the city centre.

## 2. Engagement Feedback Summary cont.



# 3. Interpreting feedback

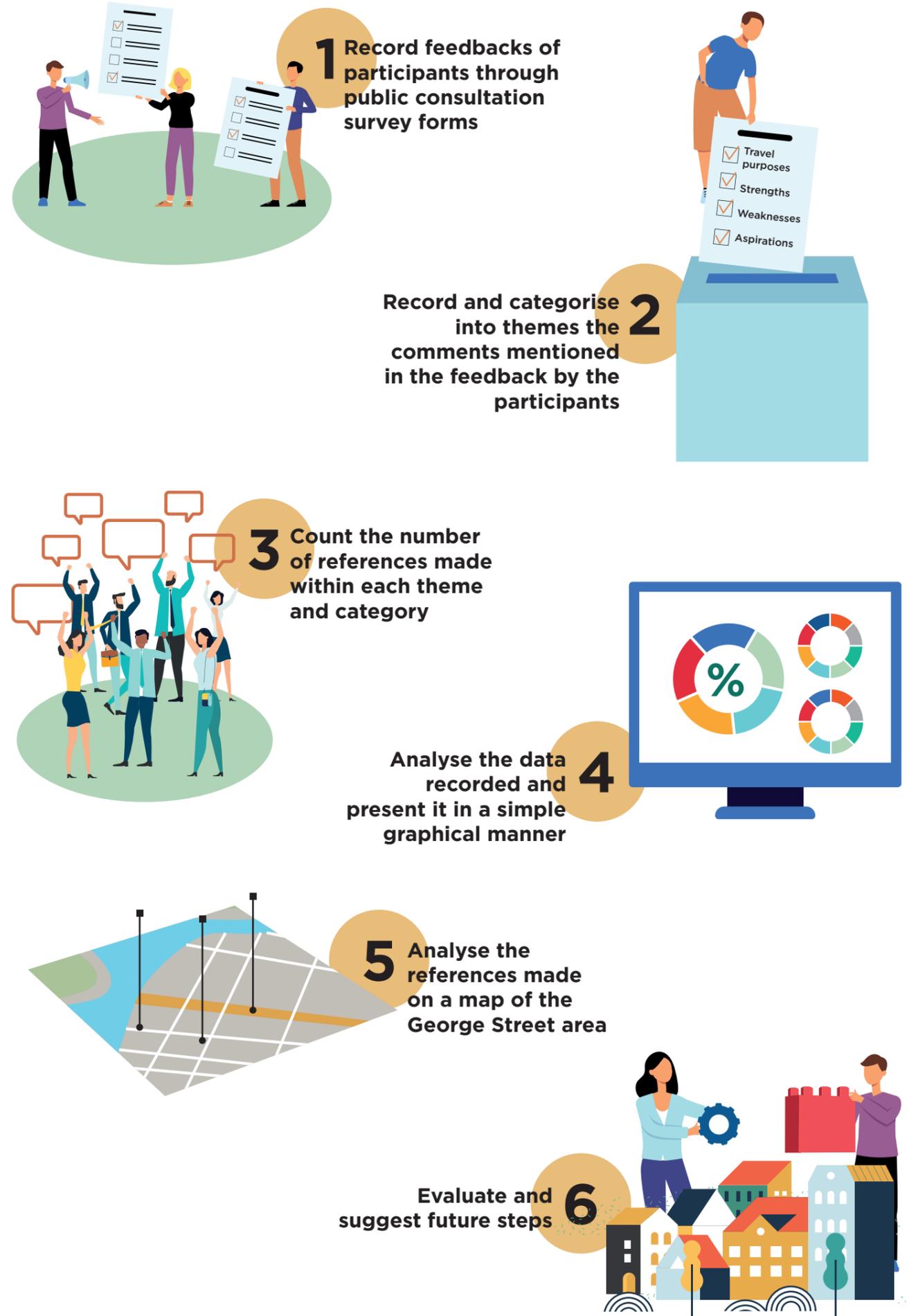
The main messages and feedback from the consultation exercise have been interpreted by OPEN to aid the future design process. The following section further details the responses to the questionnaire and identifies key themes.

## The themes

The feedback received was analysed in such a way that highlighted the number of times key words or phrases were mentioned, which allowed for the creation of particular themes. The themes were informed by the prevalence of words and descriptions, ensuring that all comments would be captured within a broader theme.

The following section details the main themes that emerge out of the strengths, weaknesses and aspirations for the George Street area. Each theme forms a means of grouping and evaluating feedback and which will be interpreted and used to inform future change and interventions for the area.

The questionnaire also asked if respondents felt the area was connected to and part of the city centre. The responses to this feedback have been combined with the themes of questions 1-4 to produce a mapping exercise to highlight where areas of intervention could be allocated.



## Strengths themes

**447** comments mentioned the strengths of the area

**14%**

of comments mentioned how well connected and easily accessible the area is

**Accessibility & Connectivity**



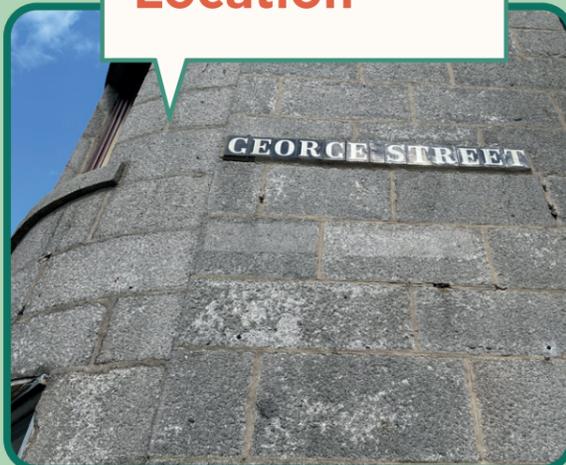
**Built Character**



**9%**

of comments referred to the built character of George Street and the surrounding area

**Location**



**57%**

of comments believe the site is in a great location

**12%**

of comments remarked on the diversity of the area

**Social Character**



**8%**

of comments remarked on the public realm across the site

**Public Realm**



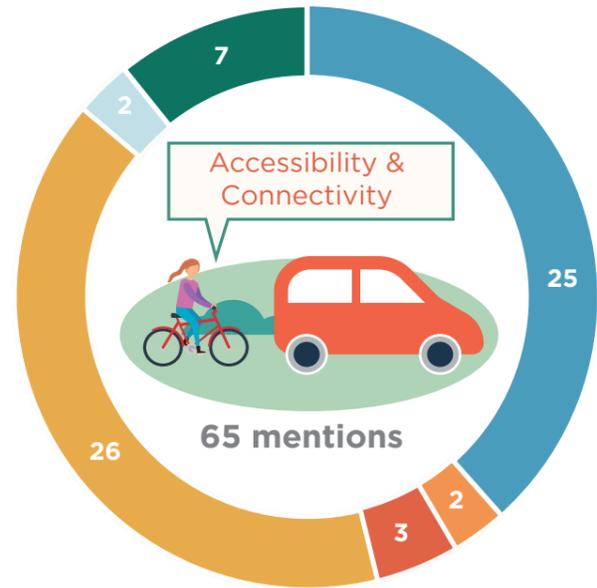
“...Its a very central location, has good transport links, easily accessible...”

“Unique area, original layout with passageways”

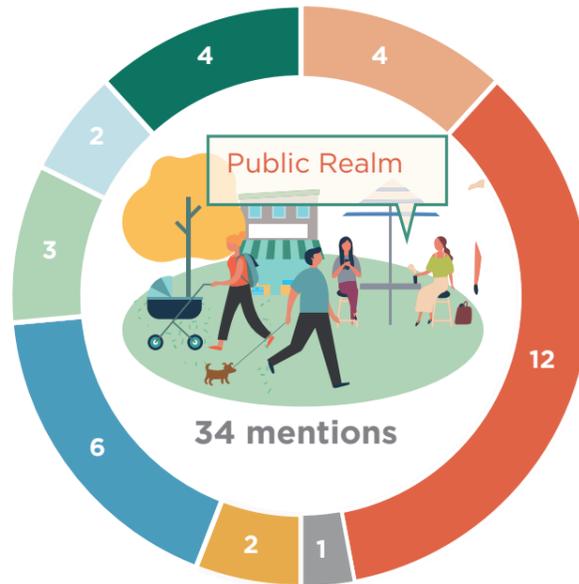
“Close to the centre of town, and allows access to other parts of town”

“I think the mix of modern buildings and traditional buildings is attractive”

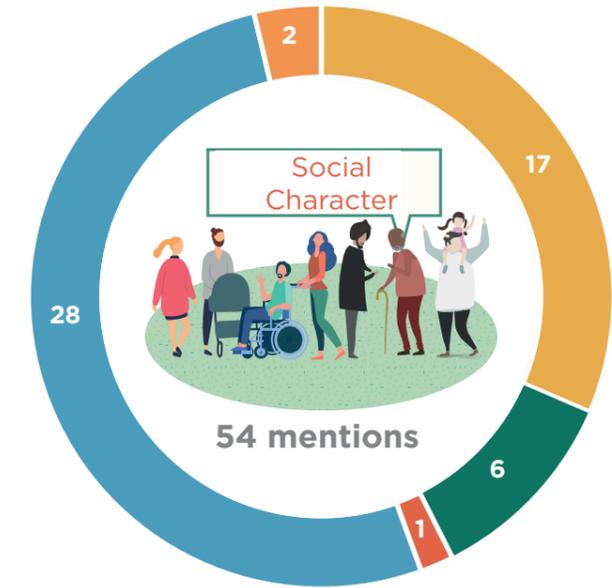
# Strengths themes



- Public transport accessibility
- Cycle accessibility
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Vehicle accessibility
- Easily accessible location
- Low traffic



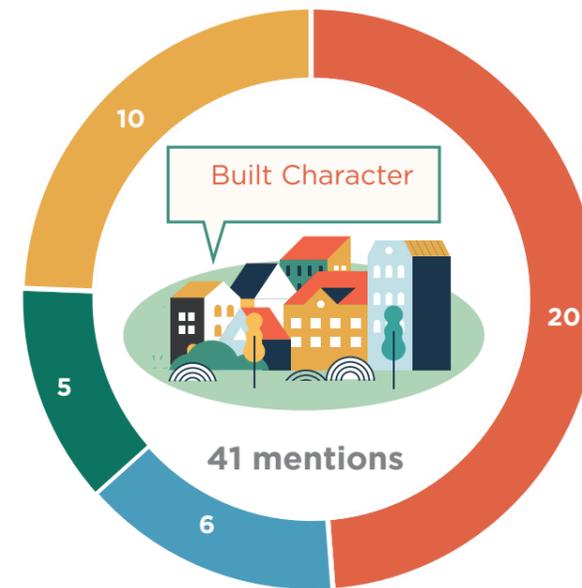
- Interesting street art
- Lively atmosphere
- Lit up street signs
- Disability/ age friendly
- Community atmosphere
- Good street width
- Street furniture
- Clean street



- Diversity of user groups
- Mixed use neighbourhood
- Safe and friendly
- Multi cultural presence
- Sentimental connection



- City centre based location
- Proximity to parking facilities
- Proximity to Bon Accord
- Proximity to college
- Footfall generating location
- Access to retail and repair facilities
- Access to independent local businesses



- Traditional architecture
- Affordable residential area
- Recent hotel development nearby
- Development potential

**!**  
The circle graphs show the 5 main strengths associated with the area and how many times that strength theme was mentioned within the responses. They also show a breakdown within each of what elements were considered important to each theme.

## Weaknesses themes

**709** comments mentioned the weaknesses of the area

**20%**

of comments remarked on the public realm across the site



**Crime and Safety**



**11%**

of comments mentioned crime levels and safety in the area

**Poor Maintenance**



**37%**

of comments remarked on the overall maintenance of the area

**Access**



**16%**

of comments referred to accessibility of the area

**16%**

of comments felt there was a lack of facilities in the area

**Lack of Facilities**



“...Feels a bit dodgy / unsafe when walking around...”

“ There’s always a lot of dog dirt about on the streets and some anti social behaviour in areas ”

“Terribly run down, no decent shops left”

“Expensive parking, out of order parking machines, lack of contactless payment for parking, strict enforcement of parking fines. Long walking distance to parking. Lack of free parking”

“Not a lot of reasons to visit. Doesn’t feel very safe. Not a nice area.”

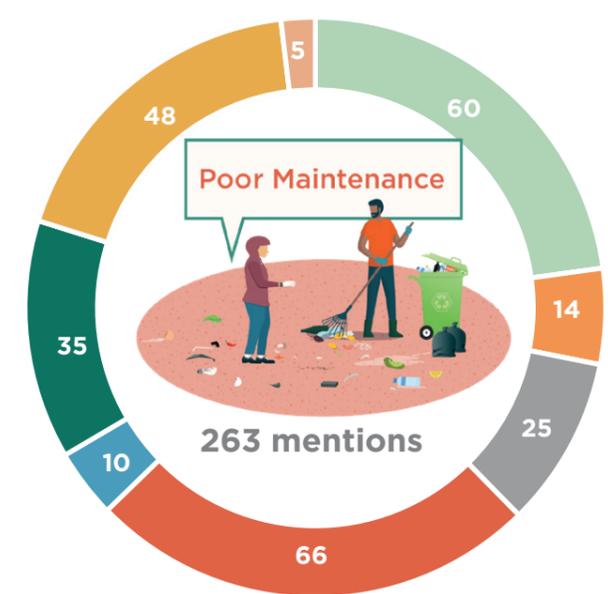
# Weaknesses themes



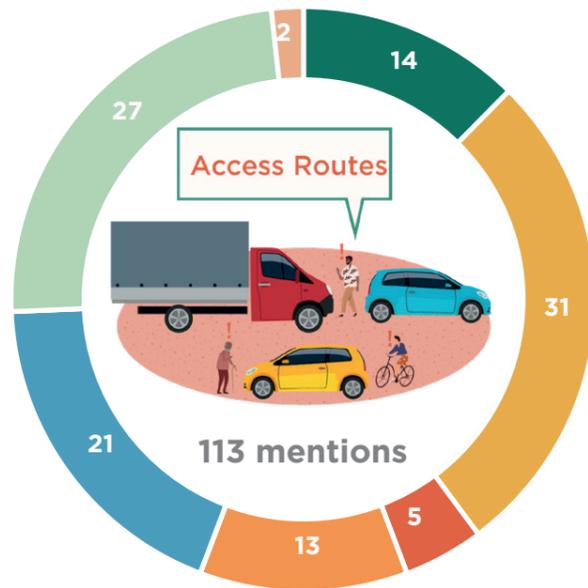
- Exposed garbage bins
- Run down look
- Idle loitering on pavements
- Uninviting aesthetics
- Narrow pavements
- Unaesthetic John Lewis building
- Seagull nuisance



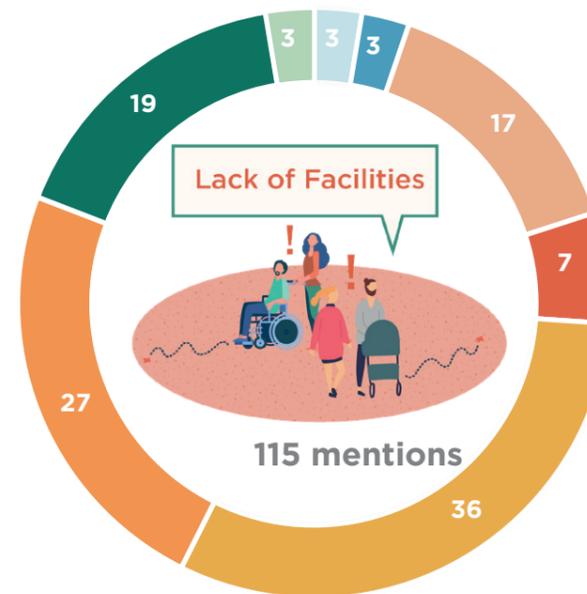
- Anti social behaviour
- Crime occurrence
- Unsafe for unescorted children
- Street fights by drunks
- Low quality/Unsafe residential area
- Night time safety concerns



- Littered pavements
- Uneven/broken pavements
- Dog mess
- Low quality shops/businesses
- Foul smell
- Unoccupied properties
- Closure of John Lewis
- Neglected by council/police



- Poor travel links
- Unsafe pedestrian experience
- Unsafe cycling route
- Severance due to Bon Accord
- On street parking/ double parking
- Traffic built up
- Difficult driving experience



- Poor facilities for wheelchairs and prams
- Public transport facilities
- Lack of street lights
- Poor road markings
- Expensive/unavailable parking facilities
- Absence of inviting activities
- Lack of green space
- CCTV coverage for safety

**!**  
The circle graphs show the 5 main weaknesses associated with the area and how many times that weakness theme was mentioned within the responses. They also show a breakdown within each of what elements were considered important to each theme.

## Aspirations for Change

**705** comments mentioned aspirations for change

**25%**  
of comments mentioned a need for future changes to the public realm in the George Street area



**13%**  
of comments want to see future improvements to public facilities



**8%**  
of comments made referenced to future improvements to safety and security

**24%**  
of comments made reference to improving the maintenance of George Street

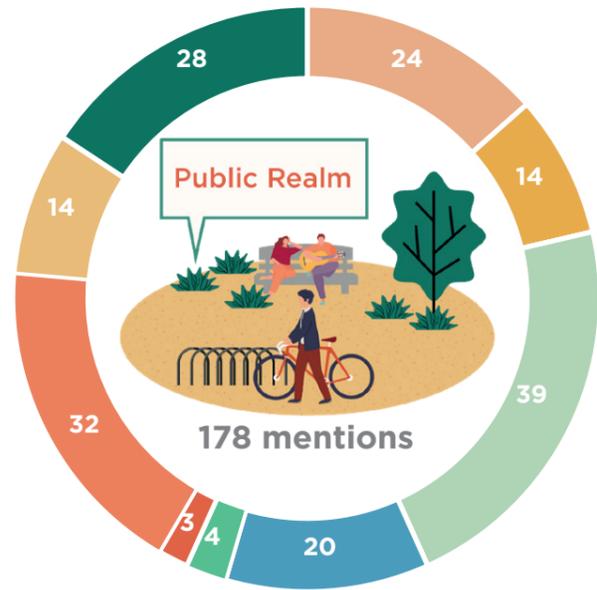


**30%**  
of comments has aspirations of future economic growth in George Street



- “...Perhaps the pedestrian area outside the previous John Lewis building could be made more of?”
- “Improve Harriet St for pedestrians and consider allowing cyclists to go against the one way signage”
- “Would green space be possible?”
- “Something exciting done with the John Lewis building that is a draw to the area”
- “More retail, coffee shops, more street lights, more police presence.”

# Aspirations for change themes



- More pedestrian spaces
- More cyclist facilities
- More green areas
- Social/ community spaces
- Take inspiration from other European cities

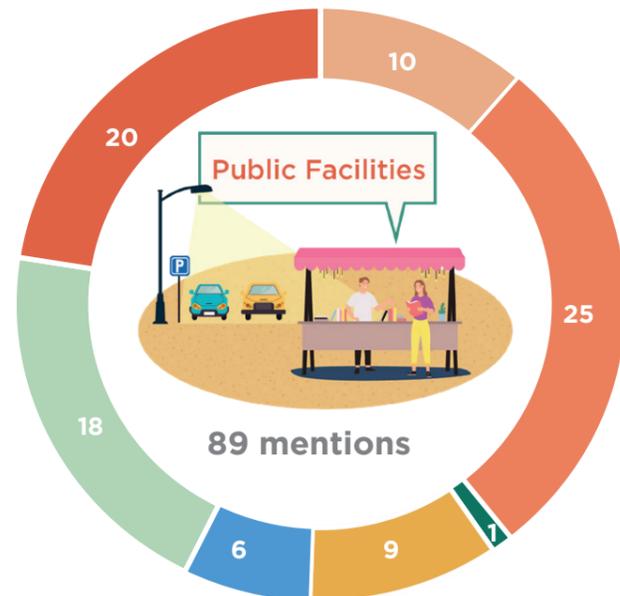
- More colour integrated in the streets
- Wider and well constructed pavements
- Welcoming street ambience
- Modernise/ update the streetscape



- Increase policing/safety measures/CCTV
- Control criminal activities
- Measures to reduce anti-social activities



- Introduce investments into the area
- Revitalise Bon Accord and John Lewis
- Independent local businesses
- Good quality retailing options
- Increase cafes/ restaurant businesses
- Attract more footfall
- More inclusion during decision making
- Make use of empty store spaces/ properties



- Increase public transport links
- Affordable/ convenient parking
- EV charging points
- Demolition of John Lewis and Bon accord
- Better housing facilities
- Better street lighting
- Include more entertainment and activities



- Remove street parking
- Increase access from adjoining streets
- Garbage management on street
- Clean and maintain building façades
- One way traffic movement
- Traffic management
- General cleanliness of the area
- Remove seagull nesting sites
- Introduction of speed limit

**!**  
The circle graphs show the 5 main aspirations for change associated with the area and how many times that aspiration theme was mentioned within the responses. They also show a breakdown within each of what elements were considered important to each theme.

## Identifying the key headlines from the feedback

The following summarises some of the key messages from the consultation exercise. These should be considered when establishing the design brief in the next steps towards the creation of a mini masterplan for the George Street area.

### Aspirations for Change

- Desire for more green space and space to allow cafes and bars to provide outdoor seating.
- To address the crime levels and improve the sense of safety in the area it is hoped that there would be increased policing and CCTV.
- Addition of diverse and good quality retailing options such as pop up markets / street events and access to local produce. This would further promote the lively atmosphere throughout the day
- Enhancement of the public realm to allow for more entertainment space to increase footfall. These enhancements would also improve the overall cleanliness of the area and made the area more easily accessible for pedestrians.
- Affordable and convenient parking for those who wish to travel by car to George Street.

### Reconnecting to the City Centre

The feedback largely agreed that George Street felt somewhat disconnected to the popular elements of the city centre. This is seemingly due to the physical severance caused by the Bon Accord Centre and former John Lewis Building, but also due to the closure of a number of shops ultimately reducing reasons to visit the area.

Those who felt it remained part of the city centre thought this was due to its accessible nature, being an easy walk to Bon Accord and St Nicholas Street as well as its close proximity to Aberdeen beach, the University and Union Street. There was also a sentimental value added by those who have known the area for many years and are therefore familiar with how the area has grown.

Pages 28-29 identify a number of potential areas of intervention, as raised in the feedback.



“I can see it becoming a popular location for independent businesses, quirky charity shops, and local entrepreneur start-ups. ..If you could offer more local businesses cheaper rates (at least to start with) to get in and liven the place up I think it could become a great destination- Especially if you widened the pavements permanently, you could have artisan cafes, restaurants/bars with seating outside...”



“...I think by building upwards in this area with modern architecture but also retaining the traditional aspect on the lower levels would give people more of a reason to populate the area. Modern architecture could bring more light to the residences and businesses that rent or buy the properties...”



“A way of making the shop signs and displays have a more heritage feel to it would be good. A limit to the size of signage might also help...”



“Brighter Street lighting and cleaner buildings. Some regular police patrols to make it feel safer would be good also.”



“I look forward to seeing a positive change in the area that further develops the community feeling and diversity that is already there.”



“I'd like to see the streets cleaner and a better quality of shops on George street.”

“More recreational space, and green areas. It needs to be a more diverse area, so not just about retail.”



“Increase connectivity from adjoining streets for the students and pedestrians walking towards college, Schoolhill and Union Street.”



“It seems a bit isolated. The Bon Accord centre blocks the free flow of people to explore George Street. It almost as if the Bon Accord centre is a final destination when coming from the south side with not much beyond it.”

## 4. Next steps and conclusions

Through thorough analysis of the consultation feedback and establishing key themes, a number of potential interventions have been identified. These interventions, both physical and non physical, could be further considered through the development of a Design Brief and Mini Masterplan to sustain and enhance the dynamic community within George Street.

### Potential physical / spatial interventions

- Opportunity to enhance and modernise the streetscape of the George Street Area, which could include enhancements to the public realm and provide improved pavements, places to dwell and spaces to host street events.
- Revitalising the streetscape by looking at ways of filling vacant properties and establishing a co-ordinated shop frontage design. These would help to reactivate the area and reduce perceptions of decline / dereliction.
- Introduce space and facilities to help support temporary and meanwhile uses, to introduce more activity and animation to the area. This type of intervention could include pop up events, temporary road closures, temporary seating, planting features, signage and wayfinding. The space created would also allow businesses to expand out into the street to host events.
- Improve the pedestrian experience through enhanced materials, low level lighting, wayfinding, pedestrian prioritisation measures, better managed and potentially reduced street parking as well as planned cycle lanes and safe cycle storage to encourage more cyclists into the area.
- Improve safety and crime rates in the area, through enhancements to the public safety such as more CCTV, better street lighting and greater levels of activity (through different uses and types of spaces) to improve the sense of safety both during day and evening.
- A more radical suggestion raised through the consultation feedback was to demolish both the Bon Accord Centre and former John Lewis building and to replace with public facilities, public space, green space. This and other options would need to be tested and appraised through the George Street Mini Masterplan Area study.



### Potential non physical / spatial interventions

- Creation of a brand identity and localised incentives for visits for George Street that helps to promote a stronger online presence.
- Working with the council, local community groups and stakeholders to expand the city centre events programme to include the George Street area.
- Creation of a business community to support those investing in the area and to coordinate local businesses.
- The feedback suggests the existing community is strong and well connected, however a coordination group could be set up among residents to liaise with businesses to organise local events.
- Continued inclusion and collaboration with locals and stakeholders throughout the design and decision making process.
- Creating incentives for local entrepreneurs to set up in the area.
- Increase investment opportunities in the in the area to attract larger brand names. There is a view among feedback that big brand names would encourage more business and footfall in the area.

### Developing a Design Brief

The feedback generated by the consultation exercise between February and March 2022 has identified clear themes and areas for intervention from those who use and visit the area on a daily basis.

These themes should help inform a Design Brief for future development in the George Street Area. The Design Brief should set out a clear vision and objectives, key short term interventions and 'quick wins', longer term physical interventions as well as exploring the future use options of the John Lewis building. The Mini Masterplan should then advocate a preferred option for change within the context of the wider City Centre Masterplan which will identify key projects for future investment and delivery.

### Continuing the conversation

Ensuring there is continued engagement throughout the design process, allows for a more constructive and inclusive approach to the creation and delivery of masterplan strategy.

Encouraging open conversations and sharing of ideas helps us better understand the needs and aspirations of local communities and ultimately leads to sustainable and publicly endorsed decisions and ultimately an enhanced sustainability of these communities.



