

**Aberdeen City Council  
George Street Mini Masterplan  
Stakeholder Engagement Report  
November 2022**



### Project Background

In November 2021, Council agreed to note the current position regarding George Street and continued uncertainty surrounding the future of the former John Lewis building. Officers were instructed to undertake public and stakeholder engagement on the future of the area in early 2022 and to report back to Council in June 2022.

In February/March 2022, the Council **undertook public consultation** to better understand resident, visitor and business thoughts on what George Street is currently like to visit, live, work and shop in, and to understand what changes consultees would like to see in any future plans for the area. Nearly 300 responses were received.

This engagement process allowed Aberdeen City Council, to understand local stakeholder and community members views and aspirations for the George Street area. 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.

### George Street Mini Masterplan

#### Consultation Analysis

June 2022



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

During Summer 2022, OPEN were commissioned by Aberdeen City Council to undertake a study which analysed the feedback. The OPEN study set out the key ideas which could 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 the consultation process. The report also sought to establish potential areas for intervention which could be addressed through a Mini Masterplan for the George Street Area, as part of the wider Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan proposals.

Through thorough analysis of the February/March 2022 consultation feedback, a number of potential interventions were identified by OPEN. These interventions, both physical and non physical, could be further considered through the development of the Mini Masterplan to sustain and enhance the dynamic community within George Street. These are contained within OPEN's mini masterplan report.

At the Council's June 2022 Committee, an instruction was given to bring forward a masterplan for the George Street area and report back to committee in December 2022. A draft George Street Mini Masterplan has been prepared with the additional input of stakeholders. If approved by Council, it will be subject to wider public and stakeholder consultation. Ensuring there is continued engagement throughout the design process, encouraging open conversations and sharing of ideas will lead to more sustainable and publicly endorsed decisions.

A key part of continuing the conversation will be to host a number of stakeholder workshops as well as a public consultation exercise. The findings of these will help to inform the final design and regeneration strategy for the area.

## Engagement Approach

The Council's City Development Group Board approved the overarching City Centre and Beach Masterplan engagement strategy on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022 which suggests the undernoted steps when preparing engagement plans for individual projects.

1. Programme confirmed
2. Engagement Objectives/Scope & Scale/Stakeholders/Messaging/ Q&A agreed
3. Transportation input re any transportation issues
4. Ensure Equalities input to enable Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) and ensure any equalities recommendations are incorporated in engagement plan
5. Ensure design team has planned/undertaken any technical engagement timeously
6. Prepare engagement materials /agree wider PR with ACC comms
7. Briefing to City Centre & Beach Masterplan Stakeholder Forum/onboarding key stakeholders as required ("pre-engagement" phase)
8. Deliver engagement (methodology will vary depending on the project and stage of approval/design it is at)
9. Update Stakeholder Forum/Stakeholders
10. Wider Feedback
11. Engagement Report & Summary

Each engagement plan takes cognisance of Aberdeen City Council's **Engagement, Participation & Empowerment Strategy** and the **National Standards for Community Engagement**

## Engagement Summary

This summary covers the period from August 2022 (when an initial engagement plan was prepared for the George Street Mini Masterplan) to October 2022 (when stakeholder engagement in relation to preparation of a Draft Mini Masterplan was completed). The Council's Community Learning Team is proactive in the George Street area and has undertaken complementary consultation in relation to "softer" issues of importance to the community. The local Community Development Officer assisted streets-UK in identifying a wider range of stakeholder groups. The officer then approached stakeholders and asked if they were willing to participate in the mini masterplan engagement.

streets-UK prepared a stakeholder database (Appendix 1) and all stakeholders were contacted in September 2022 to explain that a Draft Mini Masterplan was being prepared and seeking their input. ACC Officers requested that individual meetings/presentations were offered to a number of stakeholders such as George Street Community Council, Robert Gordons College and NESCol.

**George Street Community Council** - streets-UK attended the September 2022 meeting to introduce the team, give an update on the wider City Centre Masterplan and explain the process and timescales to develop the Mini Masterplan for George Street. The Community Council was encouraged that George Street was the subject of a study. However, there was debate over the extent of the red line area with some Community Councillors noting that the whole of George Street should be in the study area.

**NESCoI** – Council Officers, OPEN and streets-UK attended a Campus Futures meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 to introduce the team, explain the process and timescales to develop the Mini Masterplan and seek College support in ensuring the voices of their students and staff were heard as part of wider public consultation anticipated for early 2023.

**North East Sensory Services (NESS)** – is a long standing resident of the area and as well as staff and users of NESS attending a stakeholder workshop on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022 (discussed below), a bespoke event was run exclusively for NESS users on 5<sup>th</sup> October and supported by an interpreter.

**Stakeholder Workshops** – On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022, two stakeholder workshops were held in NESS offices. The objective was to create a shared vision for the George Street Mini Masterplan, check that the design team understood the character of the George Street area and to explore some initial project ideas. OPEN presented some initial ideas for a vision and their initial observations of the area before moving on to discuss potential project ideas.

A summary of the workshops is in Appendix 2. All workshop participants were in broad agreement with the George Street Mini Masterplan Vision and a number of additional project ideas were proposed for further consideration by the design team.

Areas discussed in these sessions were:

- First reactions to OPEN's analysis
- Potential vision statement
- Potential projects

## Our Place Connected!

**The 'local' Neighbourhood:**  
a vibrant, city centre community at the heart of reinvention.

A place to form new connections; Social, Cultural, Economic and Educational.  
An authentic neighbourhood offering an evolution of George Street; a place for people to come together; with spaces that link activities, aspirations and ideas.

First reaction feedback during these sessions included comments as follows:

- Lack of urban landscaping and green spaces. Only decent green space is at Hutchenson Street.
  - Feels busy and vibrant – but not alive after 5pm
  - Historical connection severed by Bon Accord Centre – some connections are constrained
  - There is a real fragility of business – although George Street has survived Covid relatively well, its small independent businesses may be lost because of energy costs.
  - The area doesn't feel overly safe at night – lighting is poor
  - Concern about transport and bus routes.
  - George Street has become increasingly constrained with clutter.
  - Diversity is great - lots of ethnically diverse shops
  - College, Robert Gordon's, Sandman and Finnies are all attractors.
- Estimate of 11,000 people potentially associated with all on a daily basis.
- There are few big sites that could be real game changers, e.g. Broadford Works.

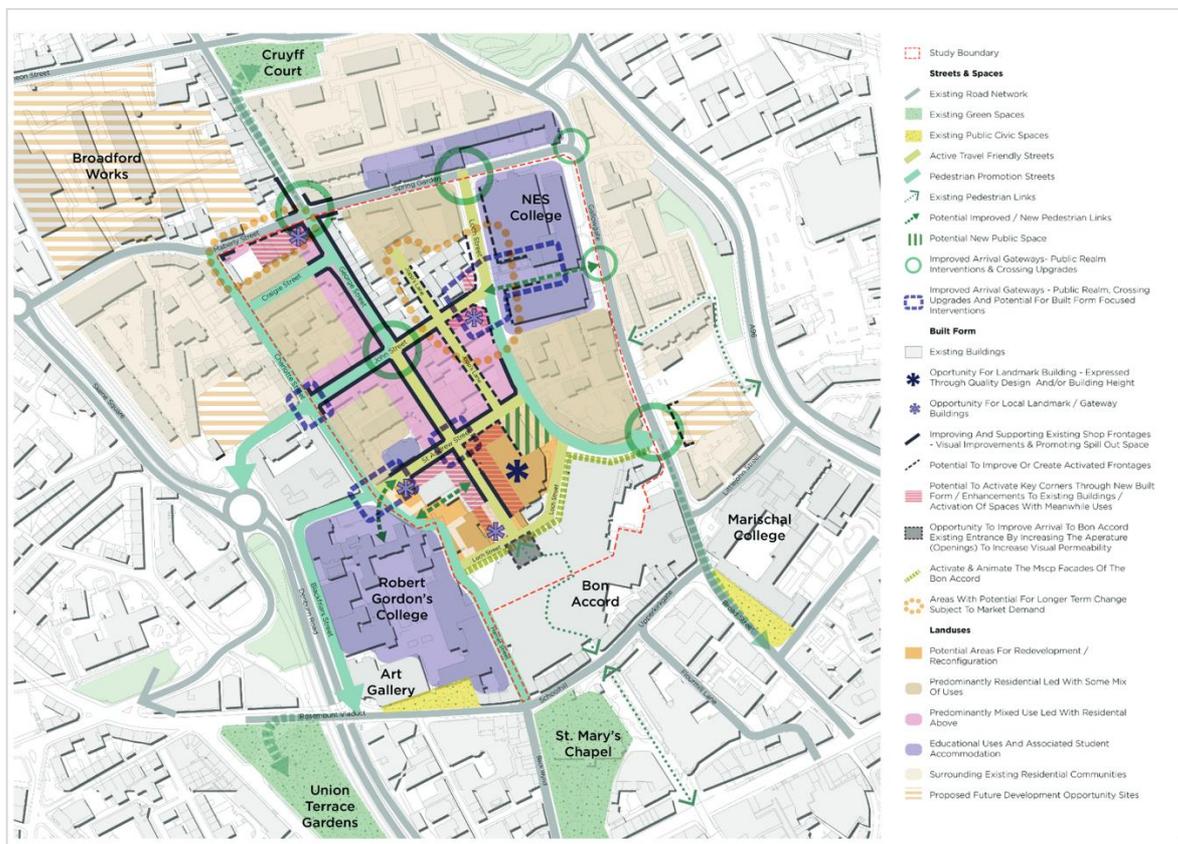
## Engagement Outputs

All participants who attended the October 2022 workshops were in broad agreement with the George Street Mini Masterplan Vision and a number of additional project ideas were discussed for further consideration by the design team. These are included in the Draft Mini Masterplan for public consultation.

## Next Steps

If the Draft Mini Masterplan is approved by Council, it will be subject to wider public and stakeholder consultation in early 2023. Because of the large volume of young people using the area, it is important that the public consultation has ways to ensure young people are encouraged to take part.

Feedback sessions will also be held with stakeholders to share with them how they have shaped the masterplan.



**George Street Masterplan  
Vision & Opportunities Stakeholder Workshops  
7<sup>th</sup> October 2022 @ NESS Offices, John Street  
11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 with NESCol Campus Futures Team**

**Workshop Agenda**

- Setting the Scene / the wider context
- Key Findings from Previous Consultations
- Design Team's First Impressions
- What the design team has discovered
- A Draft Vision for discussion
- An initial Strategy for Change
- Potential Focus areas

**First reactions/feedback from 7/10 workshop participants**

- Lack of urban landscaping and green spaces
- Feels busy and vibrant – but not alive after 5
- Historical connection severed by Bon Accord – some connections are constrained
- There is a real fragility of business – although George Street has survived Covid relatively well, its small independent businesses may be lost because of energy costs.
- The area doesn't feel overly safe at night – lighting is poor [Greater George Street Traders Association had an extension to the CCTV system approved and would like to know its status.]
- Concern about transport and bus routes.
- George Street has become increasingly constrained with clutter.
- Only decent green space is at Hutcheson Street.
- Diversity is great - lots of ethnically diverse shops
- College, Robert Gordons, Sandman and Finnies are all attractors. Estimate of 11,000 people potentially associated with all on a daily basis.
- Broadford works really needs tackled – there are few big sites that could be real game changers.

**Potential Vision was discussed**

*George Street: A place Connected!*

*The 'local' Neighbourhood: a vibrant, city centre town at the heart of reinvention. A place to form new connections; Social, Cultural & Economic. An authentic neighbourhood offering an evolution of George Street; a place for people to come together; with spaces that link activities, aspirations and ideas.*

**Discussion**

- General agreement that the draft vision reflects the George Street that stakeholders recognise.
- Could George Street area be a "Test Town"
- Bon Accord could support George Street's position in the city as a feeder/ entry level district

- Temporary uses of space. WASPS have a waiting list for their existing studios in Aberdeen. Grays School of Art are taking 3 temporary units on Schoolhill/Upper Kirkgate.
- Flexible offices could be an opportunity.
- Could former John Lewis building be cleaned/repurposed
- Space between Bon Accord and St Andrew Street could be improved really quickly. Could there be a focal point for kids? A place for communal activity?
- Could former John Lewis not be repurposed as a space to attract people?
- A clean up of the area/deep clean needed. Could obsolete satellite dishes be removed.
- Creating a focussed zone to improve/invest in will benefit the whole area and spill out
- Sympathy towards reducing cars and creating a better balance between moving people around and creating attractive spaces.
- Small things like purpose designed bins, seating, flowers all help to lift the area
- Could there be a cohesive design/signing/area identity that would help people explore and navigate the area
- Really important to involve young people in public consultation.

### **City Campus Futures. NESCol, 11<sup>th</sup> October**

Presentation to Campus Futures Group.

Discussion:

- Masterplan aspiration reflects broader changes that are happening e.g. increasing diversity and variety, supporting start ups.
- Access to college isn't ideal...through Bon Accord/Harriet Street.
- There's a really high number of young people. NESCol students tend to live locally – doesn't have a campus vibe. An extended campus idea would be interesting.
- Uses for former John Lewis - Multi cultural centre? Science Centre?
- Encouraging evening use – the area doesn't feel comfortable/safe in the evenings
- NESCol looking at Skills Centre.
- Creative Industry Students. Rehearsal space. "Aberdeen's Greenwich Village"
- Congestion at 5pm is an issue. Closure of Upper Kirkgate has impacted.
- Is there space for sustainability and food? NESCol has horticultural students
- Campus is pretty full capacity – but there is a downtime – weekends/evening/holidays. Family learning and Cosy Campus being considered.
- NESCol keen to use the Campus 24/7
- Could Bon Accord be a more "public right of way" outwith hours?
- Social space in Bon Accord – bowling etc. Could that be used better?
- Active Travel – connected journeys
- Reconnect with NESCol to ensure its students involved in the public engagement

## Stakeholders as at October 2022

<b>Stakeholder Workshop Participants</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Title (If Known)</b>
Bon Accord Centre Managers	Commercial Manager
<u>Greater George Street Traders Association</u>	Chair
ACC	Community Capacity Building
Aberdeen Inspired	City Centre Manager
Aberdeen Inspired	Networks/Events
Aberdeen Inspired	CEO
DEP	Member
George St Community Council	Member
North East College	Head of Planning and Academic Partnerships
North East College	Head of Sector - Hospitality and Leisure
North East College	Head of Sector - Care, Education and Social Sciences
ACC Arts/Culture/Tourism	
Look Again	Project Lead
Aberdeen Art Gallery	
North East Sensory Services	CEO
George St Community Council	Member
Robert Gordon's College	Director of Finance
<b>Stakeholders unable to attend/keep updated</b>	
The Care Hub	
ACC Health Improvement Officer	
ACC Youth Work Team	
ACC Housing	
NHS	
Robert Gordon's College	Director of Development, Marketing and Admissions
ACC	Locality Planning Manager
Look Again	
Look Again	
Dee Swimming Club	
Aberdeen Multicultural Centre	
St Margarets Church and Hall	
Catherine Street Community Centre	
ACC Wellbeing Coordinator	
ACC	
John Lewis Partnership	
ACC Arts/Culture/Tourism	
George St Community Council	Chair
Police	City Centre Officer
Police	
Alcohol Drugs Action	

<b>Other Stakeholders to Update via other Fora</b>	DEP, ACTUP, Stakeholder Forum	Streets UK to update as part of standing agendas
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