



George Street Draft Mini Masterplan Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report: Non-Technical Summary



September 2023

CONTROL SHEET

Client: Hub North Scotland Ltd
Project Title: George Street Draft Mini Masterplan
Report Title: Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report: Non-Technical Summary
Document number: 13210
Project number: 376431

EnviroCentre Limited Office Locations:

Glasgow

Edinburgh

Inverness

Banchory

Registered Office: Craighall Business Park 8 Eagle Street Glasgow G4 9XA

Tel 0141 341 5040 info@envirocentre.co.uk www.envirocentre.co.uk

This report has been prepared by EnviroCentre Limited with all reasonable skill and care, within the terms of the Contract with Hub North Scotland Ltd ("the Client"). EnviroCentre Limited accepts no responsibility of whatever nature to third parties to whom this report may be made known.

No part of this document may be altered without the prior written approval of EnviroCentre Limited.

EnviroCentre Limited is registered in Scotland under no. SC161777.

VAT no. GB 348 6770 57.

Contents

1	Non Technical Summary	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Consultation on Draft George Street Mini Masterplan	1
1.3	Background to the George Street Mini Masterplan	2
1.4	Integration of the SEA with the George Street draft Mini Masterplan - development process & engagement with stakeholders	2
1.5	SEA overview	2
1.6	SEA Screening	2
1.7	Scoping the level of detail for the assessment.....	2
1.8	Description of the Proposed Draft George Street Mini Masterplan	4
1.9	Context of the Proposed Draft George Street Mini Masterplan	4
1.10	Environmental Baseline.....	5
1.11	Implementation and Monitoring the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan	8

1 NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan has been carried out by EnviroCentre, on behalf of Aberdeen City Council.

An SEA is required for the draft George Street Mini Masterplan under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. The SEA has been carried out alongside the development of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan and seeks to ensure that, once adopted, the George Street Mini Masterplan contributes positively to the high level of environmental protection now expected by the Scottish Government. The SEA seeks to ensure that potential significant effects on the environment of implementing the George Street Mini Masterplan, and of reasonable alternatives, are identified, described, evaluated and taken into account before the George Street Mini Masterplan is adopted.

To support the public consultation on the draft George Street Mini Masterplan and the potential effects on the environment of its implementation, an Environmental Report, which documents the SEA process and outcomes, is required under the SEA legislation. This Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Report is also required to facilitate wider consultation.

1.2 Consultation on Draft George Street Mini Masterplan

Consultation on Draft George Street Mini Masterplan

The Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report was issued to the SEA Gateway on **10 July 2023** for distribution to statutory consultees (Historic Environment Scotland, NatureScot and SEPA). Consultee responses were received on **23 August 2023** (refer to Appendix B)

Responses to the consultation on the draft George Street Mini Masterplan and its potential effects on the environment were sent to: nmcdowell@aberdeencity.gov.uk OR

Nigel McDowell,
Senior Planner,
Aberdeen City Council
Masterplanning, Design and Conservation
Development Management / Strategic Place Planning
Commissioning Marischal College
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1AB

Online Consultation August 9th August – 10th September 2023

In accordance with the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, Section 16 Consultation Procedures, a Notice advertising that the Draft Environmental Report, and associated non-technical summary, was placed in the Aberdeen Evening Express newspaper on Wednesday 8th August.

The Notice advised that for a period of four weeks, between 9th August and 10th September 2023 the documents would be hosted online using the Aberdeen City Council CitizenSpace webpage and interested party opinion was sought on the content of the Draft Environmental Report. The Environmental Report illustrates what are considered to be 'significant' environmental impacts to the

environment of the masterplan area, or the mitigation measures considered necessary, should the recommended projects be implemented. The consultation did not generate any responses.

1.3 Background to the George Street Mini Masterplan

The George Street Mini Masterplan highlights the main issues for development in the George Street Mini Masterplan area and sets out scenarios for how these will be dealt with, including consideration of existing and new sites. The draft George Street Mini Masterplan sets out a Vision and a series of Objectives and Actions for regenerating the George Street area.

1.4 Integration of the SEA with the George Street draft Mini Masterplan - development process & engagement with stakeholders

Whilst the George Street Mini Masterplan's development process was not explicitly subject to SEA from the outset, a number of SEA type activities were undertaken by Aberdeen City Council and their consultants during the preparation of the George Street Mini Masterplan including community consultation and engagement. These activities played a key role in informing the early development of the George Street Mini Masterplan in advance of the formal SEA process.

The SEA process began in **October 2022** and since then has been undertaken in parallel with the development of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan with interaction between the SEA team and the George Street Mini Masterplan team.

1.5 SEA overview

The SEA aims to inform the draft George Street Mini Masterplan development process. It is important to note that the draft George Street Mini Masterplan is a high level plan and as such, the approach taken to the SEA has been of a high level assessment. This SEA is not intended to address issues that should be considered during the assessment of lower-level plans or complementary strategies which may support implementation of the George Street Mini Masterplan.

1.6 SEA Screening

Aberdeen City Council screen plans to determine whether an SEA for the plan should be undertaken. When a plan is likely to have significant (i.e., negative, damaging, large or long-lasting) effects on the environment, the Council will undertake an SEA. (If the effect is not significant, no further action is taken and a pre-screening report would be prepared). In this case, it was determined by the Council that the environmental effects of the George Street Mini Masterplan will potentially be significant and therefore a full SEA is required, therefore, a formal Screening Opinion was not sought from the SEA Gateway.

1.7 Scoping the level of detail for the assessment

The approach to the SEA of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan initially involved determining the level of detail of the SEA to ensure it was appropriate to the draft George Street Mini Masterplan (called 'Scoping'). An SEA Scoping Report was produced and issued to SEA Gateway on 13th January 2023 for consultation. Consultee comments received 17th February 2023. The Scoping Report presented the findings of the initial consideration of potential environmental effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan. It included information on the environment relevant to the development of the draft George

Street Mini Masterplan (environmental baseline information) and a proposed approach to assessing the environmental effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan.

The responses to the Scoping Report were taken into account to inform and adapt the approach to development of the George Street Mini Masterplan and the undertaking of the assessment of the George Street Mini Masterplan's potential effects on the environment (Appendix A of the SEA Environmental Report). The responses to the Scoping Report consultation provided comments on an initial review of relevant plans, programmes, strategies and associated environmental protection objectives to which the George Street Mini Masterplan and the SEA would need to refer. A list of environmental protection objectives (termed 'SEA objectives') were identified under nine environmental topics, which would be appropriate for the George Street Mini Masterplan to work towards. The SEA Objectives used as a framework for the assessment of the George Street Mini Masterplan are included below in Table 1.

Within Table 1 we have attempted to align air, noise and climate objectives as they are related in terms of sources and impacts and ideally should not be considered in isolation. Air quality is also considered under 'Population and Human Health' given it is a public health issue as well as an environmental consideration.

Table 1: Environmental Receptors, SEA Objectives and Questions

SEA Topic	SEA Objectives	Questions
Biodiversity (Flora and fauna)	Protect or conserve and, where possible, restore and enhance biodiversity and valued nature conservation habitats and species.	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conservation objectives of International, National or local designations? • populations of protected species, their habitats and resting places or roosts? • wider biodiversity, i.e., non-designated/protected sites and species? • existing green network and habitat connectivity? • opportunities for enhancement or expansion of the green network and wider habitat connectivity? • the protection and enhancement of urban trees?
Population and Human Health	To protect and enhance quality of life, including maintaining and improving opportunities to access public open space and the natural and historic environment	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of housing and employment opportunities to meet identified needs? • the provision of appropriate services and community facilities to meet identified needs? • residential amenity, including noise? • access to open spaces, recreational facilities and active travel routes? • access to the historic environment?
Water	To protect and enhance the ecological status of the water environment	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ecological status of identified water bodies: • surface water run-off • flood risk in the local and/or wider areas?
Soil	To maintain or improve soil quality, quantity and function and prevent any further degradation of soils	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contaminated land? • Impact to existing topsoil and/or subsoils?
Air	To improve or maintain air quality and reduce emissions of significant pollutants	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan be likely to reduce/increase air quality, in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carbon emissions? • levels of Nitrous Dioxide (NO₂) and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀)?

Climatic Factors	To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to the consequences of climate change	To what extent will the strategy or policy promote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency? • sustainable transport and active travel? • future proofing of new development? • Green infrastructure provision?
Cultural heritage	Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment.	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Archaeological sites, Conservation Areas and Gardens and Designed Landscapes and their settings?
Landscape	Protect and enhance landscape character, local distinctiveness and promote access to the wider environment.	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the landscape character and setting of settlements?
Material Assets	To reduce waste and promote the sustainable use of resources	To what extent will the Mini Masterplan affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waste from new development? • the re-use of previously developed land and buildings? • the delivery of renewable energy development?

To set the context within which the draft George Street Mini Masterplan will need to operate, the SEA Objectives were used to support identification of significant environmental issues and used as a framework for establishing the environmental baseline against which the effects of implementation of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan would be assessed. Through this process, some initial monitoring indicators were identified for measuring progress of the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan towards achieving the SEA Objectives.

1.8 Description of the Proposed Draft George Street Mini Masterplan

The draft George Street Mini Masterplan will serve as a strategy document used by Aberdeen City Council to guide the future development of the George Street area. The draft George Street Mini Masterplan will not be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, but rather will be a Council approved strategy, and will be assimilated into a recalibrated City Centre and Beach Masterplan. These documents will be material considerations in the assessment of any future planning applications for development within the George Street area.

It is proposed that, following the approval of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan by the Council, detailed planning applications within the George Street area would be submitted, while the public realm aspects will be progressed by the Council under statutory powers, as previously confirmed by Committees. It is important to stress that the draft George Street Mini Masterplan sets out principles and parameters to be followed and will not be 'set in stone' or represent a final design solution for the George Street area or any of the constituent developments. The document will outline a potential phasing strategy for the prospective developments and interventions within the George Street area. **Chapter 4** of the SEA Environmental Report contains a detailed description of the content of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan, and the different Scenarios and alternatives considered.

1.9 Context of the Proposed Draft George Street Mini Masterplan

To guide the content of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan EnviroCentre has made use of high-level documents, statements and pieces of legislation to influence how the Council have prepared the draft Mini Masterplan which affects Aberdeen.

Appendix C of the SEA Environmental Report contains a list of all the relevant plans, programmes, strategies, and policies which have a bearing on the draft George Street Mini Masterplan. of the SEA Environmental Report contains a more detailed description of these.

1.10 Environmental Baseline

We have collected information on the key characteristics of the environment in Aberdeen and the George Street area where information is available, to provide a snapshot of the state of the environment in the George Street area of Aberdeen at this time (**Chapter 4 and Appendix D of the SEA Environmental Report**). We have also identified a number of environmental problems in Aberdeen, and what the role of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan might be in address these problems. The challenges we must deal with include:

- Aberdeen has air quality issues and have implemented three Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's), the closest to the draft George Street Mini Masterplan area being the City Centre AQMA;
- Aberdeen releases significant amounts of CO₂ as a result of heating, driving vehicles among others. This is releasing CO₂ into the air and is contributing to climate change;
- Past and present development have all affected soil and water quality;
- Dealing with waste also has implications for soils, water and climate;
- Aberdeen has a rich cultural heritage, development is putting pressure on these resources;
- New development can put pressure on biodiversity; and
- The diversity of the Aberdeen population needs to be considered for future development. For example, there are a range of ages living in Aberdeen who seek services, retail facilities, open space and recreational facilities, therefore the draft George Street Mini Masterplan must cater for all, including people who live in the area.

The George Street neighbourhood is located towards the northern boundary of the City Centre & Beach Masterplan area. George Street itself runs North to South, forming a once historic key route between the city centre core and areas to the North of the city.

The area is defined to the south by the Bon Accord Centre, which does sever the historic connection to the City Centre. It is bounded to the south west by Robert Gordon College and Charlotte Street, and by Gallowgate and North East of Scotland College (NESCOL) to the east, and Spring Garden to the north.

George Street hosts a diversity of uses which give the area its own distinct character all of which sit within the wider context of Aberdeen's economy and cultural offer.

The main part of SEA is assessing the effect of the strategy, policies and supplementary guidance on the environment. A summary of our findings can be found in the table below:

SEA Topic	Impact of the Mini Masterplan
<p>Biodiversity (Flora and Fauna)</p>	<p>The overall effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan on biodiversity is generally positive and includes key "Design Principles" which indicate all new development will consider biodiversity. However, the demolition of the Norco House extension (Scenarios 1 and 2) and full demolition of Norco House and extensions (scenario 3) had the potential to disturb bats, therefore bat surveys are recommended before any works commencing.</p> <p>There are also potential biodiversity opportunities included within future potential interventions such as SUDs, blue/green infrastructure. There is also a commitment for tree and floral planting to enhance biodiversity (using native species where possible). Interventions include proposals for "green wall infrastructure", green pillars (stacked upright structures) etc.</p>

	<p>The Mini Masterplan also provides opportunities for bioretention verges and/or rain gardens with pollinator friendly perennial planting, semi-mature tree planting of pollution tolerant species.</p> <p>Removal of Norco House and/or the extension presents an opportunity to open up the area and provide additional green spaces.</p>
Population and Health	<p>The overall effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan on population and health are generally positive because the new development will provide access to retail/recreational/leisure facilities, improved infrastructure and potential new employment and economic opportunities.</p> <p>Traffic as a result of the Mini Masterplan will be managed to ensure the George Street area becomes a destination rather than a through route. Sustainable alternatives to car travel will be encouraged within the Min Masterplan, with active travel aiming to provide potential positive effects on human health.</p> <p>Promotion of sustainable travel will also aim to assist meeting City Centre air quality targets.</p> <p>There are opportunities for bioretention verges and/or rain gardens with pollinator friendly perennial planting, semi-mature tree planting of pollution tolerant trees with an upright habit such as <i>Tilia cordata</i> 'Geenspire' among others.</p> <p>The process of creating and delivering masterplan projects aims to create optimism, certainty, investment and improved general wellbeing. When founded in community engagement this should give greater place enjoyment, a sustainable place, and a liveable place.</p>
Water	<p>The overall effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan on water resources are also mixed. The "Design Principles" promote the use of Sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) and blue/green infrastructure. The provision of SUDS and blue/green infrastructure can provide opportunities for biodiversity gain. Flood and Drainage impact assessment will be required before development. It must be noted however, the area is historic and dense and therefore SUDS is a challenge to be assessed in context.</p>
Soil	<p>The Aberdeen City Council Contaminated Land Strategy (2016) states, "Regeneration of city centre sites and other brownfield sites throughout the existing built-up area for appropriate uses will be encouraged as an important part of the Plan's strategy."</p> <p>The Mini Masterplan covers the area as described above, and as such, previous land uses may have had the potential to leach contaminants into the surrounding areas. Without knowing how contaminated material, if any, was dealt with when the site was first developed, it is not possible to discount the possibility that contaminated material will be encountered on site.</p> <p>The draft Mini Masterplan does not contain any specific guidance on the protection or enhancement of soils, which would be undertaken with specific greenspace proposals, however, measures are included within future projects such as retrofitted rain gardens, SuDS, and planting which filters out pollutants.</p>
Air	<p>The effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan on the environment are generally positive.</p> <p>The draft George Street Mini Masterplan "Scenarios" could increase economic activity, recreational activity etc. in the area, and could result in an increased number of vehicles on the roads which emit greenhouse gases. However, the Mini Masterplan includes key "Design Principles" to promote sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling and public transport. The Mini Masterplan aims to ensure the George Street area becomes a destination rather than a through route. Sustainable alternatives to car travel will be encouraged within the Min Masterplan, with active travel aiming to provide potential positive effects on human health.</p>

	<p>The promotion of sustainable transport is also likely to benefit the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) the Mini Masterplan area sits to the north of the City Centre Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and LEZ, and the promotion of sustainable travel aims to assist meeting City Centre air quality targets and LEZ objectives.</p>
<p>Climatic Factors</p>	<p>The overall effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan are generally positive. The draft George Street Mini Masterplan sets out the approach, pathway, and actions towards meeting Net Zero and climate-resilient assets and operations by 2045. As such, energy-efficient designs can be incorporated alongside renewable and low-carbon energy sources, with consideration provided on how further decarbonisation could be achieved in the future.</p>
<p>Cultural Heritage</p>	<p>The effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan on cultural heritage are generally positive, particularly the appreciation of listed buildings. The loss of Norco House and/or extensions is mixed. Two of the three options look to preserve the iconic Norco House. It should be noted that Historic Environment Scotland have previously been asked to consider this structure for listing. Following an assessment using the selection guidance it was found that the surviving two principal elevations (to George Street and to St Andrew Street) of Norco House met the criteria of special architectural or historic interest. However, the decision was not to list the building because of ongoing development proposals. The Design Principles indicate that heritage will be protected, and people’s understanding and enjoyment of it enhanced through the new developments and interventions.</p> <p>The Mini Masterplan strengthens the sense of place being proposed and the opportunities for new business to support old provide an opportunity to support cultural heritage.</p> <p>There is also potential to gain provisional floorspace in Norco House which can provide overspill exhibition space for the nearby Art Gallery, which adds an additional cultural heritage link in the vicinity.</p>
<p>Landscape / Streetscape</p>	<p>The overall effects of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan on the surroundings are mixed. Large-scale development scenarios, such as the demolition of the distinctive Norco House and extension (Scenario 3), which can be seen from several locations, could have a potentially negative effect on views and scenery and the character of the George Street Area.</p> <p>Option three does, however, including potential biodiversity opportunities within potential future interventions such as SUDs, blue/green infrastructure. There is also a commitment for tree and floral planting to enhance biodiversity (using native species where possible). Interventions include proposals for “green wall infrastructure”, green pillars (stacked upright structures) etc.</p> <p>The Mini Masterplan also provides opportunities for bioretention verges and/or rain gardens with pollinator friendly perennial planting, semi-mature tree planting of pollution tolerant species.</p> <p>Removal of Norco House and/ or the extension also presents an opportunity to open up the area and provide additional green spaces.</p> <p>Additional potential effects include Installing green walls, living walls and other urban greening solutions as part of a neighbourhood wide urban greening strategy. This could focus on large scale blank gable ends and façades that are orientated to support green walls, with a secondary focus on smaller infill areas.</p>
<p>Material Assets</p>	<p>It is important to recognise George Street itself is a material asset within the City Centre boundary, and is being taken forward within the City Centre and Beach Masterplan refresh.</p> <p>The overall effect of the draft George Street Mini Masterplan is mixed. There are, for example, positive effects associated with the re-use of previously developed land and buildings.</p>

	<p>Scenarios may involve demolition works which will increase waste, however, there are opportunities to improve the management of resources and construction waste through the programme of works for example, through the development of Site Waste Management Plans.</p> <p>Delivery of renewable energy use is not discussed in detail within the draft Mini Masterplan, however, at the detailed design stage, there will be opportunities to incorporate energy efficiency into individual buildings, which could involve the use of heat pumps, passive heating, low emissivity, thermally efficient double-glazing, photovoltaic panels or thermal panels. There are also potential opportunities to link into the Aberdeen Heat and Power district heat network.</p>
In summary	<p>The assessment process found that all three scenarios could easily be considered successful, high-quality, potential design solutions, but will require more detail as redevelopment proposals. Overall the draft George Street Mini Masterplan has the potential to provide significant positive environmental effects across all three scenarios, in addition to specific place projects identified to improve the overall environmental conditions. Where these are mixed (i.e. positive and negative effects) there are opportunities which could be positive if the process to development and future interventions are comprehensively undertaken.</p>

Chapters 5 and 6 of the SEA Environmental Report describes in more detail the approach to assessment of the environmental effects and mitigation measures to help mitigate the negative (or enhance the positive) effects of the development Scenarios.

1.11 Implementation and Monitoring the Draft George Street Mini Masterplan

Monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementing the draft George Street Mini Masterplan is a fundamental part of the SEA process. The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the significant environmental effects of a plan or programme to be monitored and that the Environment Report (this report) should include a description of measures 'envisaged' for monitoring the implementation of the plan. Chapter 7 of the SEA Environmental Report explains how significant negative and positive effects of the plan and provides a description of what will be monitored, how this can be undertaken and how often.