

City Centre Eastern Quarter



Context

The key purpose of this project is to progress specific outcomes which emerged from the Dundee City Council's City Centre Strategic Investment Plan 2050 (CCSIP), and to facilitate capital spending on public realm improvement projects.

Various city centre areas with their own unique characteristics were identified through the CCSIP process, with the Eastern Quarter emerging as a priority area due to its significant challenges and opportunities. There is much to be gained in this area through improving the quality of the built environment and public realm, unlocking opportunities for development by rationalising and repurposing existing building stock and introducing significant SuDS infrastructure, along with strengthening pedestrian connectivity to peripheral areas and assets.

The key challenges and opportunities within the Eastern Quarter area are as follows:

- General lack of care and maintenance of private buildings.
- Undervalued streets, pends, wynds, and courtyards.



- High number of vacancies within ground floor shopfronts and upper levels.
- Concentrations of poor quality, low-rise, and low-density buildings.
- Significant number of vacant and underused buildings and sites of scale, e.g. Wellgate Centre, King’s Theatre, and the Langlands & McAinsh site.
- Drainage capacity issues that need to be resolved to unlock development of the large-scale sites and neighbouring sites.
- Lack of green and blue infrastructure.
- Poor quality bus station and the onward Seagate pedestrian route to the heart of the city centre is also poor.
- Poor quality active travel routes to peripheral areas and assets, such as City Quay, Olympia swimming pool, Gallagher Retail Park, Hotel Indigo, and the Transportation Museum.
- The proposed Eden project raises the potential of this area and reinforces the need for improved connectivity and an enhanced public realm.

Through a variety of current and future funding grants and applications, the City Council possesses a capital budget which is intended to be spent on public realm improvement projects. The Eastern Quarter has been earmarked for such investment and therefore there is a need to establish a programme of deliverable pipe-line projects to fast-track capital spending.

What Happened

During May 2024, specialist urban design consultants were appointed to deliver on a brief which contained two core tasks. The ‘Task 1 Area Masterplan’ required a strategic assessment of the Eastern Quarter area and the creation of proposals for future public and private sector development and improvement. The consultant team commenced the task with a day-long internal stakeholder session to gather appropriate information and views on the area. An iterative process unfolded with the consultant team throughout the remainder of 2024 to develop and refine the masterplan proposals. This included targeted discussions with Scottish Water to develop the blue and green infrastructure proposals in support of required SuDS. Completion of the area masterplan also established a project long-list of public realm improvement projects. Following significant internal discussions with Council officers from the planning, transportation, environment teams, a prioritised short-list of public realm improvement projects was confirmed for further development through task 2.

The ‘Task 2 Public Realm Improvement Projects’ required the consultant team to develop, cost and present a programme of deliverable public realm improvement projects to inform future capital investment. As with task 1, an iterative process is ongoing with the consultant team and various council officers to develop the projects. The finalised projects will include concept designs and high-level technical information to help provide estimated costs.



In combination, both the task 1 and 2 documents will help to promote the potential and ambition for the Eastern Quarter area. This is vital to attracting private sector investment into the area by giving investors the confidence that the City Council has a long-term vision for the area and is willing to invest in a high-quality public realm that supports the redevelopment and sites and buildings.

Areas of Collaboration

The project is being led by a Dundee City Council Planning Officer, working in partnership with an external consultant team (landscape architect, architect, transportation experts, and quantity surveyor), Scottish Water, and local authority officers from our Sustainable Transportation, and Environment teams.

Overall Result

Key outputs from the consultant works:

- An area masterplan which communicates a vision for the future of the Eastern Quarter area and attracts public/private sector investment.
- A programme of deliverable, pipeline, public realm improvement projects that are developed to concept design stage, with budget costings to assist the City Council with fast-tracking capital spending.

Key outputs from the implementation of the masterplan and public realm improvements:

- Strengthened and enhanced active travel routes between the east of the city centre and the surrounding area and peripheral assets.
- An enhanced, high-quality, public realm with more blue/green spaces, which is aligned with and supports the key themes from the CCSIP; a public realm which facilitates more people living, working, visiting, and studying within the city centre.
- Securing funding opportunities and attracting public/private sector investment into the redevelopment of strategic, catalyst, buildings, specifically the Wellgate Shopping Centre and the King's Theatre.
- Attracting private sector investment into the redevelopment of other strategic sites and buildings, including the former M&S store, and the Langlands and McAinsh site.
- Attracting redevelopment of vacant upper floor spaces and filling empty ground floor units with complimentary mixed uses.
- Unlocking the development potential of the above sites through the introduction of SuDS and blue/green infrastructure.
- Stimulating increased care and maintenance of the built environment through development and regeneration of underused and vacant sites and buildings.



Lessons Learned

Successes

Continuing to play an active role in the project with the consultant team has helped the City Council to better understand the priorities and opportunities within the Eastern Quarter area. It has also stimulated greater collaboration between the Planning, Sustainable Transportation, Environment, and Strategic Projects teams to define what is possible and the challenges associated with the various public realm improvement projects.

Challenges

Maintenance of the proposed blue/green infrastructure will add to the ongoing maintenance challenges facing our Environment team. However, we need to approach this on a united front as these are not just 'nice to have' projects, they are essential in combination with the SuDS infrastructure to unlock the development potential of strategic sites and buildings; they contribute to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies; and are essential to creating spaces that facilitate more people living, working, studying and visiting the city centre. Striking a balance between introducing new blue/green infrastructure, active travel and enhanced public space/footways with the requirements of roads, vehicles and parking continues to be an ongoing challenge. We have worked closely with Sustainable Transportation colleagues to design out any project pitfalls, however, the true potential will only be possible through the detailed design of individual projects.

Lessons Learned

The City Council needs to be more confident in the knowledge it has developed for the future of the city centre and the Eastern Quarter. We could have been much more prescriptive in the project brief as to what we wanted to see within the masterplan and the public realm improvement projects being developed. This would have led to the appointed consultant spending more earlier focused time developing the product, rather than starting the project with a broad investigatory process, which had already been largely established through the preceding CCSIP project.

