

Dundee Civic Trust

Dundee: Vision for 2040

Executive Summary

The Trust's Vision for Dundee in 2040 is to see a diversified city centre with strengthened city neighbourhoods as places for people to live, work, learn and visit. A "20-minute city" where everyone can walk or cycle for essential needs and one that is compact with limits to the expansion of the built-up area. Dundee should be a well-connected city with opportunities for all its people, achieved by developing skills, fostering business innovation, and supporting our learning institutions and attractions. It should be a city where the best in design is encouraged to enhance our unique environmental setting and heritage. These are aspirations, and with cooperation and foresight many of them will be achievable in the timeframe that we are considering.

Introduction

Dundee, Scotland's fourth city, is emerging from a period of significant regeneration and development, led by Dundee City Council in partnership with other public and private bodies. It must now adjust to the challenges and indeed opportunities resulting from both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. Traditionally known for its proud maritime and industrial history and its strong social conscience and community solidarity, today the city has become a centre of excellence for design, the creative industries, biotechnology and life sciences and



higher education. Dundee has a unique inspirational estuary landscape setting, is a UNESCO City of Design, the first city in the UK to be awarded this status, and is the home of V&A Dundee, Scotland's design museum. There is much for residents to be proud of. Harnessing these and other assets will be essential in ensuring Dundee's future. There is another side to Dundee's story, however. Despite significant public and private investment, most recently in the regeneration of Dundee Waterfront, some of the city's communities continue to experience poverty, poor health and low levels of educational attainment.

Dundee Civic Trust's aspirations for Dundee are for:

Dundee to be a dynamic, compact city; a well-connected city both physically and digitally; a sustainable city pursuing net zero emissions; a learning city; a city with a clear identity that builds on its economic strengths and natural assets; and **a city where people want to live, work, learn and visit.**

To this end, the city should endorse a forward-looking ambition in providing:

- a high quality and vibrant living environment;
- a quality public realm, accessible local amenities and superb arts and cultural assets;
- an appropriate balance between commercial success and quality of life;
- a sustainable approach to housing development;
- and a strong commitment to support the needs of **all** its residents.

Whilst the Trust's main purpose is to promote the highest quality in the environment and buildings and quality of life, it recognises that this depends on the city having a strong economic and social base.

A place to live. Dundee should maintain the current population of the built-up area of the city. It should retain its compact built form, resisting urban sprawl by developing its many brownfield sites and its distinctive local communities. A "twenty-minute city" is a key objective, where homes are within 20 minutes of work, school, shopping, parks, open spaces, and areas for play on foot, bike or public transport; and a city where different communities are connected to each other via a network of pedestrian links, cycle routes, digital hubs as well as roads. Such an approach could boost the health and wellbeing of all our communities, especially those of the city's most deprived areas.

A place for work. Dundee's location relative to Scottish, UK and world markets means employment should build on its key strengths (e.g. design, biotech, digital games, engineering, higher education, tourism et al); have the very best digital connectivity; an electrified east coast rail line; a north-west by pass road to relieve



congestion; capitalise on port facilities and secure better air links to and from Dundee Airport. Addressing the city's poverty and social inequality requires a mix of employment types so measures to nurture and support small business are needed. Support should be sought from all public agencies to engender an enterprise culture.

A place to learn. Our universities, the James Hutton Institute, Ninewells Teaching Hospital, Dundee and Angus College and our schools will be key to developing employment opportunities through research, business spinouts and vitally through development of key skills and re-skilling throughout the population. These institutions will be important players in supporting new developments, such as a potential Dundee Eden Project.



A place to visit. Better communications will be important too in attracting visitors to the city, and the Trust supports further sustainable attractions that complement the V&A, Discovery Point and our other visitor offers, including a possible Esports arena in the Waterfront. Existing and planned hotel accommodation can help the area to attract the city breaks that it has yet to capitalise on. Better conference facilities are needed to exploit this important market. And the city needs to package and market its unique identity and attractions including new and better “Welcome to Dundee” signage.

Other key considerations must be to support major infrastructure that improves the city's connectivity to UK and world markets; ensure quality in the design of all new development; maximise the benefits of open spaces, parklands and the asset of the River Tay and other areas of water; support further public art; and build pride in the city. Furthermore, as a coastal city, a clear response is needed from all sectors to the many issues resulting from climate change, with initiatives such as flood protection, district heating networks and battery storage facilities. To realise this vision, the Trust also believe that Dundee, as the hub of the wider city region,

would greatly benefit from a larger Dundee administrative area that includes its natural hinterland of parts of south Angus and east Perthshire, and arguably the nearby areas of north Fife that all look to the city for much of their activities and employment.

The City Centre

Key to the success of the city as a whole is the **city centre**, which we view as wider than the area within the inner ring road, and includes the Central Waterfront, Seabraes, the two university campuses, Blackness, East Dock Street and City Quay. This city centre is the hub of the city, **the** place where people want to go. A thriving city centre must benefit all our citizens including those living in deprived areas.

The city centre's role has to change and adapt to meet future needs. While it should remain the region's principal shopping centre, the growth of internet shopping means that the amount of retail floorspace will inevitably shrink. Less office space may be needed as working patterns change with more home-working. There will be more empty frontages and buildings, threatening the future of many of our fine city centre buildings. There are many opportunities in the city centre too; high profile sites within the Central Waterfront, where we believe there should be a better proposed building mix with more housing, and more cycle and less traffic lanes; existing brownfield sites such as in Blackness and East Dock Street; important listed buildings e.g. The Custom House, the former King's Theatre and Chalmers Hall; and redevelopment possibilities as existing uses disappear.



Our ambitions are to see increased city centre activity and more city centre living; both these ambitions will help to create a more vibrant and sustainable place.

A city centre to live in. There is an opportunity to **repopulate the city centre** which will, in turn, create demand to support shops and services. Sites should be identified for a range and mix of quality housing, including social housing, including existing sites within the Central Waterfront, Seabraes and Blackness. A wholesale review of the planning strategy for the eastern city centre could highlight further opportunities, particularly in the Wellgate, Trades Lane and East Dock Street areas. These areas are all within walking distance of the central core. Conversion of upper floors of city centre buildings to flats should be

encouraged with a planning policy of presumption in favour and with appropriate financial support such as grants and/or VAT relief. This might be extended to ground floor premises given the increasing number of empty units. Local amenities for residents will be important and this might include the provision of a primary school if there is demand for family accommodation, as well as new amenity open space for residents and visitors. The possibility of providing a covered/sheltered outdoor public space should be explored. Is there not a case for more street trees? A better resourced planning system could



generally ensure a flexible approach to the use of buildings while securing high quality design. And should car parking for city centre housing be limited given better public transport?



A city centre for work. Whilst more people might well be working from home, office and service employment that serves more than just local areas should be encouraged to locate in the city centre. New government and local authority jobs, following on from the Council's success in attracting the Social Security Scotland HQ, service jobs in new industries, the games sector et. al. should all be encouraged. The Water's Edge development in City Quay is a good example to follow. This will in turn boost the rest of the city centre economy. The city centre should be the default choice for public buildings and institutions as well as events and entertainment. Some questions need to be debated. For example, should there be

more or less pedestrianisation? Is improved car access vital for business or will a car free environment encourage more people to enjoy the city?

Generating work opportunities in the city centre will require **a better-connected city centre.**

Along with electrification of east coast rail services, better commuter rail services are needed along with a revamp of the railway station at the platform level to welcome visitors to the city. There has long been a desire for a bus rail interchange or, more practicably, better bus services and waiting facilities at the railway station. Apart from inter city buses, is a dedicated bus station needed at all? Long mooted plans for park and ride sites on the main approaches to the city should now be implemented to serve the city centre and Ninewells Hospital so helping reduce traffic flows and pollution levels.



A city centre for learning. Secondary and tertiary education is vital to the city centre with The High School of Dundee, Dundee and Abertay Universities and the Al Maktoum Institute all located here. These bodies are not only seats of learning and innovative research but are major employers. A significant proportion of the student population live in the centre, both in purpose built and other flatted accommodation, providing vibrancy and diversity. The extent of new accommodation for students will reflect student demand. Despite current financial pressures, the universities

must remain key elements in supporting city centre services. Opportunities to integrate the two Universities more fully into the city, both physically (e.g. reducing barriers to movement, particularly that of the Inner Ring Road) and through research and other collaboration (e.g. a centrally-located, joint research and business centre), should be encouraged.

A city centre to visit. The city centre attracts large numbers of visitors each year, from the wider region and beyond. This pattern has been boosted with the opening of V&A Dundee, which attracted over 800,000 visitors in its first year, but people also come to visit RRS Discovery and HMS Unicorn, Verdant Works, the McManus Galleries, DCA, and the Rep Theatre, to attend events and concerts at the Caird Hall, Whitehall Theatre and other venues, and to eat, drink and shop. Visitors will remain a vital part of the centre's economy. Many of these visits are day trips and we need **to encourage overnight stays by strengthening the mix of attractions** and creating a vibrant city with cafes, bars, theatre, cinema, events and a quality environment.



Opportunities for new attractions include the recently proposed Esports arena (with flexibility to host conferences), an international museum of comic art, a city centre multi-screen cinema and a maritime centre associated with HMS Unicorn. The Trust supports the further development of the maritime trail for visitors linking the many key sites of interest within the waterfront. Shuttle links from the city centre to other attractions in the city, such as Dundee Transport Museum and the proposed Eden Project, will help encourage visitors to explore the whole city.

The city has not met expectations in attracting conference business. As this market emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic, Dundee must both improve both its facilities and its marketing in this area. Finally, the city centre must be a place for Dundonians to come, not just to shop, but for entertainment, eating and drinking and celebrating.

The wider city

Dundee is much more than just its city centre: **the wider city** is home to 140,000 residents, numerous businesses, retail parks, health and other services.

A place to live and work. Dundee has a diverse pattern of neighbourhoods, reflecting the city's growth, some with origins in the 19th century when workers lived close to mills and factories and others developed, more recently, on the periphery to meet the demand for new homes. Despite the Dundee Partnership's longstanding and successful investment in

community regeneration, e.g. in Whitfield and Ardler, poverty and inequality remain a key concern.

Strengthening all the city's neighbourhoods as sustainable communities so that all residents can meet most of their daily needs within 20 minutes walking or cycling or by public transport, must be a priority. This is the core message for the Trust's vision for the wider city. The pandemic has started to change public attitudes and behaviour, but it also requires a change in mind-set from policy makers. Key to strengthening 20-minute neighbourhoods will be the reuse of the many vacant brownfield sites in the city for housing and other uses, and rejection of further extensive car-dependent peripheral development on greenfield sites.



The city has an existing network of district shopping centres, in the Hilltown, Lochee, Perth Road, Albert Street and Broughty Ferry, which offer some of these services as well as smaller centres such as Ardler, Midmill, Happyhillock, Charleston, St Marys, Douglas and others. But even in these centres there is evidence of a change in shopping habits, with increasing numbers of empty units. In many other parts of the city, there are fewer opportunities to enable residents to access everything close to their homes. Addressing this imbalance will require a range of solutions for different neighbourhoods; further reshaping and decentralisation of public services to improve provision and ease of access; the use of more flexible planning policies in existing centres to allow a greater mix and variety of activities including housing and small-scale business uses; stronger requirements to provide facilities in conjunction with planning approvals for new developments; and enhancing shared spaces, the public realm and open spaces, to make centres more attractive, enticing and safe. Planning policy should be to strengthen district centres by applying the Scottish Government's Town Centres First policy more rigorously and any further erosion of this policy should be resisted by rejecting the development of out of centre supermarkets and other retail developments. Recent developments in Whitfield including 'The Crescent' as a

core of community facilities provide a good example of what can be achieved, and we welcome initiatives such as those of the Stobswell Forum in their efforts to support local shops and facilities and improve the area's environment.



Not all our needs can be met locally so it is important to ensure there are **strong interconnections between neighbourhoods, workplaces and the city centre**. Wherever possible, this

should be based on public transport, using zero emission buses, and ‘active travel’, walking and cycling, thus reducing reliance on the car. Active travel can be encouraged by improving existing walking and cycling routes within green spaces, developing new path networks, and rebalancing road space. The existing paths along the Dighty Burn and the Waterfront/river are excellent examples of successful green corridors, but others are needed. The redevelopment of brownfield sites provides opportunities to strengthen such connections. In addition to such initiatives, travel by car is still needed for many journeys. As Scotland’s first Go Ultra Low City, Dundee City Council has already invested in numerous EV charging hubs across the city, encouraging the use of electric vehicles, and tackling pollution hotspots. The Trust supports the continuation of this work to enable residents and visitors to travel sustainably.

Beyond local centres, **retaining and supporting existing centres of employment** is vital. There are a huge number of commercial and industrial sites currently available in the city, including properties at Dundee Technology Park and many well-known buildings on the Buildings at Risk Register. It is important to the economic success of the whole city that these buildings and sites are in use, creating employment and activity. A review of the potential of vacant and derelict industrial sites is needed and where appropriate, conversion/redevelopment to others uses should be permitted, and as already mentioned, this should include housing. There are huge opportunities to be gained from the successful development of Michelin Parc, with its focus on business innovation and creativity, and the Trust supports this important initiative.

Following the UK Government’s declaration of achieving all electricity generation from wind and solar power by 2030, the Port of Dundee can become a centre for wind turbine fabrication, as well as being a site for oil rig decommissioning work and cruise liner trade. Freeport status may help develop these businesses, but investment, skilled jobs and training are all vital here too.

A place to learn. There has been substantial investment in rebuilding and refurbishing Dundee’s schools in recent years, improving the overall quality and standard of buildings, sports facilities, and creating environments conducive to learning. The Trust welcomes the Council’s recently announced trial of relocating community centre activities into schools, thereby increasing the use of school facilities, particularly where this helps strengthen neighbourhood centres. The trial, if successful, could lead to community centre buildings becoming redundant and these should be considered for other community activities. Continued investment in Dundee & Angus College will be



vital in developing the skilled workforce of the future. The Trust recognises the importance of Ninewells Hospital and Medical School as a centre of excellence in health care, education and research and as one of the city's major employers. Continued investment is needed to ensure the continued provision of quality care at Ninewells in up-to-date buildings and facilities.

A place to visit . There is potential to support the development of further **cultural projects**, which meet the needs of both residents and visitors, such as the relocation of Dundee Transport Museum to Maryfield and a new 10-year Public Art programme. The city should take full advantage of its **Tay estuary location** with its outstanding wildlife habitats, sailing facilities such as those run by the Royal Tay Yacht Club, Broughty Ferry Castle and Museum and award-winning beach. Residents and visitors can benefit from greater promotion of Broughty Ferry as a seaside resort.



In summary, Dundee is a city of many assets, not least of which is its diverse, creative and resilient population. Our vision for the future of the city aims to build on the city's existing strong communities, strengthening the connections between them and responding to their needs.

Next steps

Dundee Civic Trust's vision for the city contains a large number of ideas and proposals, many of which could be implemented in the next ten to twenty years, and is offered in the expectation that it will encourage wider and positive debate from all stakeholders and those with an interest in their environment. Initially, the Trust would wish to engage with Dundee City Council, to discuss how Dundee's long-term sustainability can be achieved. It is essential to deliver a successful economy that benefits all its citizens, and deliver a city that is attractive to visitors and residents alike.