

Notes from LOIP engagement event – 24 April 2025

Positive Points

- Aberdeen's **main parks and museums are very good**, especially Duthie Park, Seaton Park, the botanic gardens at the university, and the Art Gallery – people appreciate having high quality spaces they can access for free. They emphasised that these spaces are used for many reasons apart from their primary functions, and nobody asks, 'why are you here?' – there's no stigma with hanging around at the Art Gallery, the way there is with dedicated 'warm spaces.' **Libraries and other community resources need to be protected as free, safe places for people to go.**
- **NESCol has a good range of courses** for young people, apprenticeships, etc.
- **Electric buses are good** – there should be more of them.
- The **Torry heating network** is good for local people.
- Overall, Aberdeen is a **very safe city** (though some areas feel less safe).
- Union Street has seen **an increase in cultural activities**, including art and music, when the community comes together. More is needed.
- The **Wallace Tower community-led project** is an exciting local development, and enhances the sense of belonging.

Overall

Nearly all the issues here have been **flagged up repeatedly over the years**, with suggestions for small changes that would prevent problems from occurring, or mitigate their impacts. There is **very little confidence** that the council is listening to people's concerns. Participants want to see a follow-up that **explains what is being done about the problems** they've identified, and if nothing is being done, then why (for example, lack of money, lack of control over the problem, too many competing priorities, etc). **They find the lack of action less frustrating than the lack of communication, which they feel indicates a lack of respect.**

Many of the different issues are interconnected – for example, problems with public transport have consequences in mental and physical health, employability, social connection, etc. Cuts to libraries, community centres and youth work contribute to antisocial behaviour and social isolation. Pressure on services and social housing open a space for racist narratives about immigrants and people seeking asylum, and when people don't have opportunities to come together, it's difficult to challenge those narratives.

However, this also means that solutions are interconnected – improvements in one area will have positive knock-on effects across the whole city.

Group 1: Moving Around, Public Transport, Traffic and Parking

Public Transport

People can't get where they need to go. All groups talked about poor, overpriced, and unreliable bus services. Key issues were inconsistency, buses not following schedules, several buses in a row not turning up, overcrowding during peak times, journeys taking much longer than advertised, lack of direct routes between key areas, lack of express services, changes in bus stop locations due to road works, drivers refusing to stop where they're supposed to, the high cost of tickets, tap-on/tap-off not working properly, drivers not lowering the door for wheelchair users or disabled passengers, etc.

- These issues make people constantly late and cause them to miss events and appointments. Contributes to social isolation, worse health (people avoiding making doctor/dentist appointments due to transport difficulties), employability issues, etc.
 - Two people who wanted to come to the consultation event were not able to, because they could not count on the buses to run as advertised (this issue does not include where bus services are missing completely, or so infrequent as to be useless). **Especially a problem with First Bus.**
- Overall, there are **not enough buses available**. This contributes to a lack of reliable routes and services.
- **Lack of communication from bus companies** regarding cancelled/delayed services.
- **Antisocial behaviour on buses**, especially young people with nowhere else to go – abuse to drivers (which makes recruitment and retention harder) and other passengers. Also lack of rubbish bins.

Road Works and Other Changes

- **All groups mentioned the increase in roadworks**, which especially impacts bus users and disabled people. For car drivers, it leads to delays, extra traffic, frustration, etc.
- **All groups mentioned lack of communication about road works** – car drivers received no advance notice, and bus drivers do not inform passengers. The updates on the website appeared several days later. Signage about road works (before and during) is inadequate.
- With **construction on pavements, alternative routes were not considered.**
- **Taxi rank removed from off Market Street**, with no nearby alternative.
- **Confusion around LEZ and Bus Gates** – what are they actually for? How do they work? People are avoiding going into the city centre, especially from the south part of the city. Where people do go into the city centre, they are likely using more fuel and causing more emissions/congestion due to longer routes.
- **LEZ has knock-on effects for tradespeople**, who can't necessarily afford to upgrade their vehicles, so they stop taking jobs in certain areas, which makes the shortage of tradespeople worse. Takes longer and is more expensive to get anything repaired etc.

- **20mph zones** likely to compound issues. Participants concerned about whether traffic lights will be adjusted to fit the new speed limits, whether patrols will be increased in areas without speed cameras (e.g. residential areas), to prevent people using 'rat runs,' etc.
- **Hydrogen scheme:** people warned about issues from the start, but were ignored. Overall, very short sighted. Unclear how decisions were made, and by whom – and who is accountable for failure of the scheme. ACC bought hydrogen cars, which could not be fuelled from the plant built for buses, which has now been left to decay.
- **£5 airport charge** to pick someone up – justification was extra security, which is now installed – so why are they still charging? Also, there is no exemption for disability.

Pedestrians and Cyclists

- **Delivery riders cycling without lights** are accidents waiting to happen.
- **Crossing times do not accommodate disabilities**, prioritising cars.
- There is **no designated crossing point on the A92 dual carriageway**, and there are limited pedestrian crossings.
- **Cycle paths are very inconsistent**, poor quality, with random stops and starts.
- **Lack of crossing signals by Marischal College (still).**

Traffic and Parking

- **All groups mentioned issues with traffic lights: too long, inconsistent, and/or out of sync**, contributing to traffic issues.
- **Blue badge parking spaces moved** to areas that are less convenient – same number but not useful for people who need them.
- **Disabled parking is becoming increasingly limited** due to LEZ zones, bus lanes, traffic, and difficulties with drop-offs and parking.
- Parking layout changes – drivers allocated a zone rather than streets. For work travel expenses, ticket or receipt don't state where driver has parked, just the zone.
- **Electric vehicle charging** – inconsistencies with payment processes, insufficient information, poor communication, not enough charging points or fast charging options available.
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Overall

- **People feel they need a car so they're not stuck in one area.**
- **Aberdeen has one major street**, it's the way the city is designed. Planning etc does not seem to take this into account. **Sustrans strategies/policies/narratives seem designed for the central belt**, don't work well in the north east.
- **Traffic policy has too much stick and not enough carrot.** Drivers are punished for having older cars, but reliable, cost-effective alternatives are not available.

- **Ambiguity about who's responsible** for traffic and parking enforcement – 'ping pong' between ACC and police.

Possible solutions

- **The only way to reduce traffic is to give people good quality alternatives.**
 - **Need more buses and drivers** to meet current demand – ideally this would also allow for **expanded routes and more frequent services**.
 - **Buses with two or three doors** help reduce congestion, improve efficiency, and support disabled access.
 - **Allow people to get off buses while stopped at traffic lights**, which would help mitigate the problem of stops being too far apart.
 - **European style buses**, with two or three doors, and better automation.
 - **Reduce ticket prices and improve options**.
 - **Deal with antisocial behaviour on buses**, for example banning people after a certain number of incidents. Plainclothes enforcement officers.
- **Proactive communication** – from the Roads team and bus companies. **Require bus companies to update people when buses are cancelled or delayed.**
- Provide **maps at bus stops** – large printed maps are much easier to read than phones, but **digital maps with live updates** would also be helpful.
- **Different bus companies should work together** to create a more integrated transport infrastructure. Engage in **effective forward planning**.
- **Consider more radical solutions:** making bus travel free at point of use, and/or bringing public transport into public ownership – if done properly, could make things much better (see Lothian Buses in Edinburgh).
- **Take the needs of disabled people into account** when allocating parking spaces, choosing street materials, etc. **Ensure blue badge spaces are where they need to be.**
- For parking, stick to streets (not zones) to avoid confusion.
- **What's happening with 'Aberdeen Rapid Transit?'**
- **Connect cycle routes, and develop routes that lead into the city centre** (rather than focusing just on Union Street). For example, routes to connect the city centre with both universities, with 'priority neighbourhoods,' etc.
- **Look at crossing signal duration** – timing considerations for all pedestrians, including those with age and disability factors.
- **Consider taxis** as part of the city's public transport infrastructure
- **Dyce airport rail link to airport** – was in original plans when building TECA – what happened?

Group 2: Streets and Spaces, Natural Space, Play and Recreation

Streets and Spaces

- **All groups mentioned issues with bins:** they are hard to find, and are unevenly distributed. Some areas have loads, some have none at all. In some areas, there are bins that are not emptied often enough.
- **Locking recycling bins** discourages people from recycling.
- **Bus shelters** often dirty, broken, covered with graffiti, poor lighting, etc – first impression is horrible, not welcoming for residents or tourists.
- **All groups mentioned dirty streets:** bars have rubbish outside, litter everywhere, streets are not clean, including broken glass that's a major health hazard.
- **Lack of proper fencing around children's play parks,** dogs get in and create a mess. Highly publicised enforcement scheme seems like a waste of money – people need to be 'caught in the act' to be fined.

Play and Recreation

- **Insufficient activities and options for teenagers** provided in parks.
- **Neglected spaces in parks** – e.g. abandoned shooting range and broken fountain at Seaton Park, abandoned sports centre at Stewart Park, etc.

Specific developments

- **St Fittick's Park, Torry** – removal of this green space is very negative for the community, which has spoken out about it repeatedly. GPs have said it will have negative health impacts for residents in one of the poorest areas in Scotland. Alternative plans were submitted but this was not minuted and no one explained why the plans were ignored.
- **Torry incinerator was not wanted by the community,** pushed ahead anyway. The same person was the planning applicant and the one making the decision (head of waste management), and there was not independent consideration of the project without bias. Contributes to Aberdeen's low rate of recycling, plus pollution, noise and eyesore in the local area.
- **Broad Hill 'upgrades' are not accessible.**
- **Union street cobblestones are likely to be problematic** for people with mobility or sensory issues, small children, etc.
- **Market project** – city centre does not need more retail space, and the gap left by the old market could have been a lovely park. As with Marischal Square, people's preferences were ignored in favour of profit-making 'development.'
- **Beach/pier project** – way more complicated than necessary, waste of money to build a pier out into the North Sea (nearby wind turbines are a clue).

Possible solutions

- **Protect existing outdoor spaces!**
- **Install more bins** (regular bins can also be used for dog waste), and **empty more frequently**. Reinstate bins where they have been removed. Ideally opt for metal bins with lids, which are harder to vandalize. **Unlock recycling bins.**
- **Employ more workers for rubbish collection and street cleaning.**
- **Install fencing** (or better fencing) around play parks to keep dogs out.
- **Install outdoor gym equipment.**
- **Make business owners responsible** for cleaning the spaces outside their bars, etc.
- **Add concession for students for bulk uplift**, to avoid fly tipping.
- **Don't spend money on projects nobody wants** – local residents have the best sense of what will work, not 'developers' from elsewhere.
- **"The council should slow down and coordinate better. Focus on one task at a time."**

Group 3: Facilities and Services, Care and Maintenance

- **All groups mentioned the lack of places where young people (or people of any age) can go without spending money.** Library closures have made this worse, and many community centres are not open in the evenings.
- **Advertising 'warm spaces' is incredibly stigmatising** – nobody wants to admit they're struggling to afford heating. There needs to be another reason to go.
- **Very limited capacity** in services for addiction etc, need more community support infrastructure like dry houses, rehab facilities, etc.
- Police and ACC **don't have capacity/resources to deal with homelessness, addiction, etc** – falls to the third sector, which is also struggling.
- **Police and fire services being 'remotely operated'** has led to a decline in effectiveness, cuts out local knowledge – they were much better before they were centralised. Removing local police offices, cuts to community policing, etc, leads to a more adversarial approach – previously, 'I know your parents' could help stop issues with antisocial behaviour from escalating.
- People running services and making decisions (not the staff on the ground) seem to be **'promoted beyond their competence.'**
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Possible solutions

- **Improve capacity and funding** for local policing, free community spaces, addiction recovery services, etc. This will require investment but will save money in the long run, and improve quality of life in the city.
 - **Consider developing a women's gym** or other safe spaces for women.
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Group 4: Work and Local Economy

- **All groups mentioned cafés closing too early** (some also mentioned this for shops) – due to licensing restrictions? Problematic because many people don't like pubs – too many things revolve around drinking alcohol.
- **All groups felt discouraged from visiting the city centre**, many complaints about Union Street, not just the road works but also empty shops.
- **Poor guidance for how to apply for planning permission** for shops etc.
- **Not enough jobs** in Aberdeen, visa issues, no sponsorships, international students can't stay.
- **Finding volunteering opportunities can be difficult**, especially with age restrictions. Outsiders might struggle to know where to go. A single point of contact is essential.
- **Maintaining volunteer engagement can be challenging** due to difficulties in recruiting and apathy among individuals.

Possible solutions

- **Allowing later opening hours** for cafés and small shops would bring more people into the city centre, which would also help with a sense of safety etc.
- **Can ACC encourage new shops**, or provide information about when new shops can be expected?
- **Provide clear guidance** (with diagrams) for how to apply for planning permission, so residents can start businesses more easily (industry already has access to guidance).
- The Duke of Edinburgh Award and schools, as well as the Aberdeen Youth Movement should **actively encourage young people to volunteer and participate in community activities**. This steady involvement can lead to employment opportunities while allowing them to gain valuable skills.

Group 5: Housing and Community

- **Maintenance of council housing** is very poor. Lights often don't work in stairwells, repairs take a long time, etc.
- **Not enough social housing and sheltered housing stock**, leading to long waiting times and people being stuck in unsuitable homes. This also puts pressure on health and care services.
- Lots of empty flats in Aberdeen (e.g. Union Street), **nobody knows who owns them**.
- **RAAC housing** – uncertainty, anxiety, worry, putting strain on mental health services.
- **Rent inflation and slumlords**.

Possible solutions

- Invest in maintaining current housing stock, and make more social and sheltered housing available.
- Better regulation of landlords.
- Clearer communication about RAAC housing.

Group 6: Social Interaction, Identity and Belonging, Feeling Safe, Influence and Sense of Control

Social Interaction / Identity and Belonging

- **Not enough public events** in Aberdeen. **Hard to find out what's happening**, no advertising from community centres.
- **Very few places to socialise after 5 pm** which are not pubs.
- **Lack of affordable community spaces to do events**, lack of awareness about spaces that can be booked. Difficulty booking spaces when you're not a charity or some kind of organisation. **More community spaces are needed.**
- **Increase in isolation, people less inclined to participate in groups or support others.** Cultural factors influence people's reluctance to help due to concerns about safety.
- Covid has led to a more reserved attitude. Social media plays a significant role.

Feeling Safe

- **Antisocial behaviour** – groups of kids on electric dirt bikes wearing masks, riding through residential areas and green spaces too fast, making noise and intimidating people. CCTV cameras don't seem to deter them, and certain areas are not patrolled.
- **Street lighting varies by area** – some areas feel unsafe due to poor lighting.

Influence and Sense of Control:

- **All groups expressed a sense of ACC being unresponsive**, people not being listened to, the same issues are raised again and again, often for years, and nothing happens.
 - Even when people know how to raise issues, they **don't feel their say makes a difference.**
 - People feel their **opinions and experiences don't matter to decision-makers.**
 - People feel like they **can't or don't know how to make a difference.**
- **Often there is poor governance** of local services and programmes, lack of checks and balances / transparency – even where the people delivering the services are brilliant.
- **What will happen with the information shared here?**

Possible solutions

- Invest in **more community spaces**, opportunities for people to come together and experience each other's cultures, etc.
- Invest in **youth work** and **evening activities/spaces for young people**.
- **Longer opening hours** for community centres, libraries, cafés and other social spaces not based on alcohol.
- **Better enforcement on buses.**
- **Promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.**
- **Public campaigns to raise awareness about citizen law.** Posters, advertisements, and other materials should be placed in public spaces to create an inclusive environment. Promote third party reporting, good Samaritan laws, etc.
- **Feedback from consultation processes** to tell people how information has been used – even if ideas are not implemented, explain why.
- **'Select committees' at local level**, where decisions are explained.
- **Better accountability/whistleblower protection.**