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different uses, the public and private planting and wider landscaping, the slope of the ground all have a role to play. Navigating an urban area as a pedestrian is vitally important, and the ease by which that is possible will determine whether the area is loved, and therefore cared for.

Most of these aspects are easily seen. However, one aspect that is less visible, but plays a fundamental role in how an urban area feels, is the density of development.

In the property development business, one way to express the density of development is the number of units per acre or per hectare. One unit being a house or a flat, a (normal sized – ie not huge) shop, office or workshop or even a public building. As a rule of thumb, an area that feels good and functions well as a walkable neighbourhood will have a density of development of between 15 and 30 units per acre. If an area has too low a development density, it will lack vitality and is often car-dominated. If an area has too high a density it results in overcrowding and a monoculture.

Think of an area you love and try to imagine what the density is. It is interesting that walkable neighbourhoods that are liked and well cared for, such as the one at Rosemount, tick the boxes for density almost completely.

It is also interesting that most modern development (there are obviously some exceptions) do not tick the boxes. That suburban housing estate springing up on the edge of our community tends to have a low density (which is interesting because most people would believe it has too high a density). Development in the centre of our towns and cities often has too high a density, consisting of high-rise flats and offices.

Maybe we should all pay more attention to development density these days?

*Contributed by Dominic Fairlie*

*We welcome contributions from guest writers to our newsletter. Please send them to [info@aberdeencivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@aberdeencivicsociety.org.uk).*

## **Newsletter No. 98: September 2023**

### **Future Events**

The series of talks arranged for 2023-2024 are set out in the Programme card enclosed with this Newsletter. We look forward to seeing you at the Royal Northern & University Club in the coming months.

As you can see, there will be no Awards given at the Annual Supper next March. Aberdeen Civic Society Awards will now be given biennially to notable recent developments which make a positive contribution to the local physical environment. This will allow for a greater choice of projects to be considered by the Awards Sub-Committee, who welcome nominations from members of the Society.

### **Denburn Restoration Project**



I am delighted that the City Council is developing a project to restore the course of the Denburn. The Denburn Restoration Project would improve biodiversity, increase people's connection to nature and improve their health and wellbeing - whilst also helping to tackle the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

A feasibility study has been carried out on 2.3 km of the course of the Denburn from Maidencraig to Kingsgate, running through land owned by the City Council, NHS Grampian and private owners.

The project would create a natural meandering burn, new wetland planting, new boardwalks, and re-aligned paths to allow people to experience and interact with nature. Community engagement will also be undertaken and linked with work from the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Depending on the revised costs, and successfully securing external funding, this project may take several years to complete.

*Contributed by Councillor Ian Yuill, Co-Leader, Aberdeen City Council*

### Our Union Street

The Executive Committee of ACS contacted *Our Union Street* to ask for an update on their campaign to revive Aberdeen's city centre. Derrick Thomson, who along with Bob Keiller has volunteered to oversee and coordinate this effort, met with the Committee in late June.



Derrick outlined the organisation's approach, as set out in their recently published white paper: <https://www.agcc.co.uk/files/Our-Union-Street-White-Paper.pdf>. *OUS* began by asking the public for ideas, collating those that seemed to have the most support and eliminating the suggestions that are beyond the scope of the organisation. The resulting list focuses on five areas of concern:

**Footfall;** improving the atmosphere of the city centre and access to events.

**Accessibility;** addressing concerns about parking and taxi/bus transport, revisiting pedestrianisation, viability of cafe culture.

**The State of the Street;** street cleaning, building maintenance, improving the appearance of empty units and existing shops, exploring temporary use of shopfront windows for exhibitions, improving aesthetics, including planting, lighting and street furniture.

**Empty shops;** finding new tenants and new uses for shops beyond retail and food and drink.

**Story of the street;** marketing, revealing the history and culture of the street, learning from other places.

Volunteers will work to explore options for all the areas of concern, reporting back to *OUS* later in the summer.

*Our Union Street* was set up as a charitable organisation by Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, Aberdeen Inspired, Aberdeen City Council and Opportunity North East. It is also supported by Shell. Most of its funding comes from private donors. Derrick stressed the need for volunteers of all kinds to make proposed improvements happen and encouraged members of ACS to get involved.

*Contributed by Julia Strickland*

### Musings on the Importance of Density

The character of an urban area has a “*feel*” that is related to many different, but linked, things. The materials used in the buildings and the public realm, street widths and how the car is managed, the style, attractiveness and consistency of the architecture, the connectivity of street patterns, boundary enclosures, the heights of buildings and how they address the street, a mix of