



Glasgow City Council
City Administration Committee

Item 2

6th February 2020

**Report by Councillor Susan Aitken, Leader of the Council and
City Convenor for Inclusive Economic Growth**

Contact: Ian Robertson Ext: 76000

GEORGE SQUARE AND SURROUNDS: EMERGING AREA STRATEGY

Purpose of Report:

To update Members on the outcome of the Public Conversation on George Square, and to seek approval on the proposed strategy for delivering improvements in alignment with the emerging City Centre Transport Strategy and the wider Avenues Programme.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members:

- (i) consider the contents of this report;
- (ii) note the outcome of the Public Conversation;
- (iii) approve the proposed budget for the George Square Area Strategy;
- (iv) approve the proposal to progress a TRO process for full closure of the east and west sides of George Square, with north/south public transport corridors; and
- (v) note that update reports on the progress of the George Square Area Strategy will be submitted biannually to Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm City Policy Committee.

Ward No(s): 10

Citywide:

Local member(s) advised: Yes No consulted: Yes No

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Members will be aware that a report on the proposal to progress a public engagement exercise on the future use and design of George Square was considered by Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm City Policy Committee on 4 June 2019.
- 1.2** A city-wide Public Conversation was subsequently undertaken in October 2019. The brief for the conversation was framed by the City Urbanist and the engagement activity involved a range of activities that focused on establishing a fresh public perspective on George Square's place within the city, how it is being used, and the possibilities for the future.
- 1.3** The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the Public Conversation, outline the proposed project strategy for delivering its recommendations, and provide some information on scope, timescales, and governance options.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1** George Square is the city's civic centre and principal urban space – a place of city-wide, national and international interest. While it has remained a constant and familiar landmark, the way it has been used has evolved over time. As well as forming one of the few areas of green space in the city centre, today it hosts a wide range of activities and events throughout the year. It will also host a number of major events in the coming years.
- 2.2** The wider regeneration strategy for Glasgow city centre presents various opportunities for George Square which forms a pivotal element of the developing City Centre Strategy. This is illustrated at **Appendix 1**. Accordingly, this project is not being developed in isolation. There is a clear opportunity to integrate the George Square design brief with that of the adjacent streets which will benefit from City Deal investment. Both George Street and St Vincent Street are part of the Avenues programme, and design work is due to commence late 2020. There is an additional opportunity to include Miller Street in this strategy, given the evident benefits of creating a quality pedestrian route from Queen Street Station and George Square to Argyle Street and the riverside.
- 2.3** One further critical element on George Square is the need to establish a sustainable traffic solution. This principal public space may form the civic heart of the city, but it is surrounded by traffic. The traffic solution for George Square will have a critical impact on the functionality and future operation of not just the local area, but also the wider city-region. The project is therefore being developed as a core part of the emerging Local Transport Strategy, due to be presented to Committee for consideration in Spring 2021.
- 2.4** The proposals in this report have therefore been developed in a holistic manner, taking the outcomes of the Public Conversation, reviewing them alongside previous public engagement exercises, and considering the collective

outcomes strategically in line with other emerging plans as the options for this central civic area are developed.

3. CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY

3.1 Following the First Minister's declaration of a global climate emergency in April 2019, the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council committed to ambitious targets in respect of carbon reduction. Scotland remains the only country to have set statutory annual targets to reduce emissions and was the first to include a fair share of the emissions from international aviation and shipping in its targets.

3.2 Glasgow City Council subsequently issued a report with a range of recommendations on climate emergency. The design process for the redevelopment of George Square will respond to these findings in the following ways:

- Introduce green infrastructure and optimise greening principles
- Mitigate against the possible impacts of climate change through the use of surface water management principles
- Enhance and reorient connections to promote and prioritise active travel and public transport
- Tackle poor air quality
- Introduce SMART infrastructure and pilot new ways to integrate sustainable urban solutions
- Deliver resilient city centre neighbourhoods by working in partnership with local communities and organisations

4. PUBLIC CONVERSATION 2019

4.1 Process

4.1.1 A range of opportunities were created in 2019 to encourage participation in the public conversation, including:

- Online tools/social media accounts
- Paper surveys at 32 Glasgow Life libraries
- On-street vox-pops
- Pop-up exhibition at the New Glasgow Society
- Six "hands-on" workshops
- Glasgow Chamber of Commerce event
- Co-creation forum

4.1.1 A total of 2,267 submissions were received, and 176 people participated in the various workshops and events, with good representation from across the city. In October and November 2019, the website used to host online parts of the conversation (www.george-square.com) was viewed 7,988 times. The focus of the conversation was on:

- How people use the Square today
- What they think about the Square today
- What George Square means to Glasgow

- What ambitions they had for the future of George Square

4.1.2 The full consultant's report on the Public Conversation can be accessed via this [link](#). A summary of the headlines is provided in the next section.

4.2 Key findings

4.2.1 The 2019 Public Conversation has confirmed that the citizens of Glasgow feel that change is required. However, a balance needs to be struck between the history of George Square (as a place and the items within it), respecting the aspects that people admire, and turning around some of the negative phrases typically used to describe it today (e.g. "*undervalued*", "*unattractive*", "*nothing special*").

4.2.2 The consultants' report indicates that two main parameters still have to be achieved before a design brief is developed:

- (i) Establishing what innovative operations and management opportunities are possible for the future use of George Square through a tested, cross-service design
- (ii) Defining the redesign and space reallocation of streets around the Square through the Avenues programme

4.2.3 This paper will not get into the detail of design or management recommendations, however it is considered that item (i) will be covered by a new Event Space and Management Strategy, and (ii) is already being progressed through the ongoing work on the Avenues Programme and the emerging Local Transport Strategy. The recommendations are further detailed, along with proposed mitigating actions, at **section 3.3** below and in **Appendix 2**.

4.2.4 While the focus of the engagement activity was on the *use* of the Square as opposed to specific features, several suggestions have been made around the type of element that could be introduced or enhanced within any future design. The main headlines of this:

- (i) A more sustainable or green Square
- (ii) A reduction in traffic or an element of pedestrianisation
- (iii) A place to sit, relax, contemplate life
- (iv) A mixed response to statues (retained, altered in layout, removed, new statues, undertaking cleaning and conservation)
- (v) A water feature, fountain or pond

4.2.5 The findings of this Public Conversation are in line with previous initiatives that have engaged the public on the future of George Square. There appears to be public consensus on some key elements, which can broadly be summarised as follows:

- More greening and sustainability
- Less traffic
- Permanently accessible public space for traversing, sitting, gathering, demonstrating
- Managed event strategy as part of a wider city centre event space plan

- Design quality
 - Public involvement in design
- 4.2.6 There are mixed views on statues: whether to retain in current locations, relocate within the Square, relocate outwith the Square, or introduce new statues and monuments. The position/inclusion of statues will be determined as the design process continues.
- 4.2.7 In relation to the desire for less traffic as expressed through the Public Conversation: another detailed consultation was undertaken in 2018 on the potential to close George Square to vehicles during the European Championships that year, and into the future. Over 5,000 citizens were surveyed specifically about temporary and permanent closure options (75% supported temporary closure; 67% permanent). It was noted that a number of those who opposed permanent closure stated that they would be inclined to support it, if public transport infrastructure was improved.
- 4.2.8 These findings supported those of the 2017 public engagement activity in the development of the Central District Regeneration Framework, the district in which George Square is located. This also established consensus that George Square needed improving from being a car-dominated, uninspiring space.
- 4.2.9 In addition, they are aligned with the current Glasgow City Centre Transport Strategy 2014-2024, which places pedestrians at the top of the transport hierarchy. Reducing traffic in George Square would meet the priority objective of reducing the impact of private vehicular traffic in the city centre. Improving the public transport experience will also support the Climate Emergency agenda, as covered earlier in this report.
- 4.2.10 Given the clear consensus on the need to reduce traffic and taking into account preliminary discussions with SPT and the local bus companies, it is proposed that the preferred option for the traffic solution at George Square is confirmed now and key stakeholder engagement is progressed, prior to undertaking the formal statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process. This preferred solution is likely to include:
- (i) Full pedestrianisation east and west sides
 - (ii) Public transport and cycling corridors north and south side
- 4.2.11 The objective is to deliver the reconfigured traffic layout, including the removal of parking, preferably in time for the UEFA European Football Championships in June 2020 (subject to the TRO process). It should be noted that the north side will remain in its current configuration until the emerging City Centre Transport Strategy is further developed.
- 4.2.12 The removal of traffic from George Square will require statutory consultation to be undertaken as part of the TRO process. Due to the widespread impact of such a measure, there is a risk of objection which in turn could require an independent hearing. Should this course of action arise it could add up to 24 months to the process before a judicial finding is made. Delivering the revised

layout in the proposed timescale will be dependent on obtaining early agreement from SPT and other statutory consultees

4.2.13 The reconfigured traffic layout would involve temporary features and facilities, as opposed to any permanent public realm works, all of which will be progressed after 2023.

4.2.14 It is emphasised that final confirmation of the traffic solution will be dependent on alignment with the emerging City Centre Transport Strategy. Extensive and early stakeholder engagement on the traffic options will be undertaken with a view to developing collaborative and sustainable solutions that will enable the project timeline to be maintained.

4.3 Report Recommendations

4.3.1 The 2019 Public Conversation has been helpful in understanding the level of ambition for George Square and its future. Principally, this has focused around ambitions for the Square to be a place for sightseeing the buildings or monuments, with grass, trees and flowers. Combined with the open space to relax, meet or socialise, and special events or occasions, there is a clear indication of how people would like George Square to be used for in the future.

4.3.2 The consultants' recommendations have been split between **Management** and **Design** and are summarised below along with a proposed action plan. A more detailed explanation of the recommendations is provided at **Appendix 2**.

4.3.3 The intention is to underpin the design strategy with these principal recommendations. While compromise is likely to be inevitable, the project development bias will be directed towards the delivery of a clear response to each recommendation made through the Public Conversation.

Public Conversation Recommendations		
Management recommendations		Action
A1	GSq is special: the main civic space and special place in citizens' hearts	Management Plan Event Space Strategy
A2	GSq should be a place for the common good, predominantly with free space available to anyone anytime	Event Space Strategy Common Good
A3	GSq is one of various event spaces and its role/function should be reflected in the programme of events	Event Space Strategy
A4	GSq should offer citizens the chance to showcase Glasgow's changing creativity	Event Space Strategy
Design recommendations		Action
B1	Design process for the future of GSq must be rooted in public aspirations	Design Strategy
B2	Design process must incorporate meaningful public engagement	Design Strategy
B3	The design itself must reflect public aspirations	Design Strategy

4.4 Project Strategy

4.4.1 Project scope

- 4.4.1.1 It is proposed that the redevelopment of George Square is delivered as part of the wider Avenues programme, ensuring that the design process, level of quality and consistency of both projects are integrated and aligned.
- 4.4.1.2 The project scope will therefore include the George Street and St Vincent Street Avenues, and George Square. In addition, the intention is to include a public realm treatment for Miller Street and Hanover Street within the design strategy. This will deliver a quality pedestrian connection from George Square to Argyle Street, and will also connect the Argyle Street and North Hanover Street Avenues.
- 4.4.1.3 It will also be important to develop a sustainable solution for the interface with Queen Street Station that effectively delivers the necessary accessibility and servicing requirements, with public transport and active travel facilities and infrastructure as appropriate.
- 4.4.1.4 The precise scope of works will be established as the design process is progressed. While there is a broad understanding of where public priorities and opinions lie, the detail will be developed through a further process of intensive analysis and public engagement. The detail of this will be worked out with the design team in due course.
- 4.4.1.5 **Appendix 3** illustrates the emerging design principles in terms of how the outcomes of the Public Conversation may be incorporated into the redesign of George Square.

4.4.2 Procurement strategy and timescales

- 4.4.2.1 The George Square project will be procured and governed as part of the Block C Avenues Design Contract, which is currently in development. Block C is expected to comprise the following areas:
- George Square
 - Miller Street/Hanover Street
 - John Street
 - IFSD West
 - Hope Street
 - St Vincent Street and St Vincent Place
 - George Street
- 4.4.2.2 The intention is to issue this tender to the market in April with the contractual appointment being made in October 2020. The related Avenues would then be progressed on an incremental basis with design work ongoing through to 2024/25 for some streets.
- 4.4.2.3 George Square and its immediate surrounds will be an early deliverable of this contract. An external design team will be responsible for the concept design,

along with that of the wider Block C design contract. In the case of George Square, the detailed and technical design will be undertaken by GCC Neighbourhoods and Sustainability Services.

- 4.4.2.4 As detailed later in this report, a phased approach will be taken to the project. This relates to the desire to utilise George Square for the UCI Cycling Championships in 2023, as well as for the European Championships in 2020. The objective will be to deliver the new traffic layout by June 2020. This will involve temporary measures, with permanent changes to existing road infrastructure to be introduced in phases thereafter.
- 4.4.2.4 One critical dependency is the emerging City Centre Transport Strategy. This is scheduled to be ready for committee consideration in Spring 2021.

4.4.3 Project costs and budget

- 4.4.3.1 Based on the outline scope of works for George Square, the estimated cost of the works is £8m to £10m. The works proposed for Miller Street/Hanover Street are estimated to cost £2m to £3m. The cost of both projects will be dependent on the final design elements, and will be finalised on completion of the design works.
- 4.4.3.2 Funding for both projects will be met from within existing capital budgets, including City Deal funding.

4.4.4 Phased programme

4.4.4.1 Phase 1

- 4.4.4.1.1 Works prior to the UEFA Championships in June 2020 will focus on the new traffic layout, to deliver on the aspirations expressed through the Public Conversation and previous engagement exercises. This will include the removal of all parking around George Square.
- 4.4.4.1.2 The plans at **Appendices 4a and 4b** illustrate the proposed road layout with all existing features of the inner Square footprint, such as statues and grass beds, remaining in their current location. The inner footprint will form a blank canvas from which the design can be further developed over the coming months. Construction of the inner footprint will not be progressed until after the UCI Championships in 2023.
- 4.4.4.1.3 The revised traffic layout can however, subject to completing the statutory TRO process, be introduced in 2020. The overarching objectives are to create a more pedestrian-friendly space by:
- (i) closing the roads at the east and west ends of the Square
 - (ii) removing parking around the Square
 - (iii) removing traffic circulation around the Square
 - (iv) enhancing a pedestrian route from George Square to Miller Street
 - (v) increasing the widths of footways to the north and south sides (post-2023)

(vi) providing step-free access across the Square (post-2023)

4.4.4.1.4 In all phases it is recognised that there will be challenges with regards to servicing of various shops, businesses, residential developments, refuse collection facilities, etc. Local access for residents will still be maintained. These issues will be fully considered in due course, along with appropriate mitigation measures.

4.4.4.2 Phase 2

4.4.4.2.1 The design process for the project will commence in late 2020 with estimated completion late 2021/22. The objective will be to commence construction works on George Square immediately after the 2023 UCI Championships.

4.4.4.2.2 Once the design team are on board, a full project plan will be developed and this will establish timescales for other key elements of work including establishing Planning and Conservation Area requirements, progressing the statue and monument conservation/interpretation plan and the event space/management strategy, and any other requirements. These will be progressed as part of the design strategy.

4.4.4.2.3 The Public Conversation report has emphasised the need to continue a transparent design process that involves further public engagement as options are developed. A public engagement strategy will be developed for the concept design stage, due to commence late 2020. This strategy will proactively consult with vulnerable user groups as well as other key stakeholders. A plan for this will be an early deliverable of the design team.

4.5 Project governance

4.5.1 It is proposed that the George Square Area Strategy project is monitored by a Cross-Party Group which will review the project as it develops. A governance structure to support this will be aligned with corporate procedures. Details of this will be reported to Members in the coming months.

4.5.2 The Senior Responsible Officer for the project will be the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods and Sustainability.

5. POLICY AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resource Implications:

Financial: As detailed at section 4.4.3 above.

Legal: George Square is considered to form part of the Council's common good and was acquired for the use and benefit of the community. Final proposals for the redevelopment of the Square will be considered by Legal Services to ensure compliance with common good legislation.

Personnel: There are no direct personnel issues.

Procurement: There will be procurement requirements for design and construction stages.

Council Strategic Plan: Specify which theme(s) and outcome(s) the proposal supports

This project supports the following themes:

- Resilient and Empowered Neighbourhoods, with specific outcomes:
 - Review plans for the refurbishment of George Square, our key civic space, following the completion of city centre developments around George Square

Priority: 87

- A Sustainable and Low Carbon City, with specific outcomes:
 - The city is clean and public spaces are well maintained
 - We have more sustainable, integrated transport networks across the city, and less congestion
 - Citizens use active travel, including walking and cycling

Priorities: 54, 55, 60,

- A Thriving Economy, with specific outcomes:
 - A resilient, growing and diverse city economy where businesses thrive

Priority: 3

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2017-22

The project will help deliver Equality Outcome 10 through direct engagement with vulnerable user groups during the project design processes.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

(no significant impact, positive impact or negative impact)
Positive impact: the project will improve accessibility through improved physical measures

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio economic disadvantage.

If approved the redevelopment of George Square will embed the findings of the public conversation into the design process, ensuring that accessibility and opportunity in George Square is enhanced for all citizens.

Sustainability Impacts:

Environmental:

This project will support the following themes:

- A Sustainable and Low Carbon Economy, specifically the following outcomes:
- We have more sustainable, integrated transport networks across the city, and less congestion;
- Citizens use active travel, including walking and cycling

Social, including opportunities under Article 20 of the European Public Procurement Directive

The redevelopment of this prime landholding and the premier civic square in the city will deliver public realm improvements that will benefit the local community and the city.

Economic:

The development and implementation of a quality civic space will add significant value to Glasgow's civic and visitor offer which in turn will lead to economic opportunity and improve the reputational position of the city.

Privacy and Data Protection impacts:

A DPIA is required by law where the processing of personal data is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

This project will not collect personal data.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that Members:

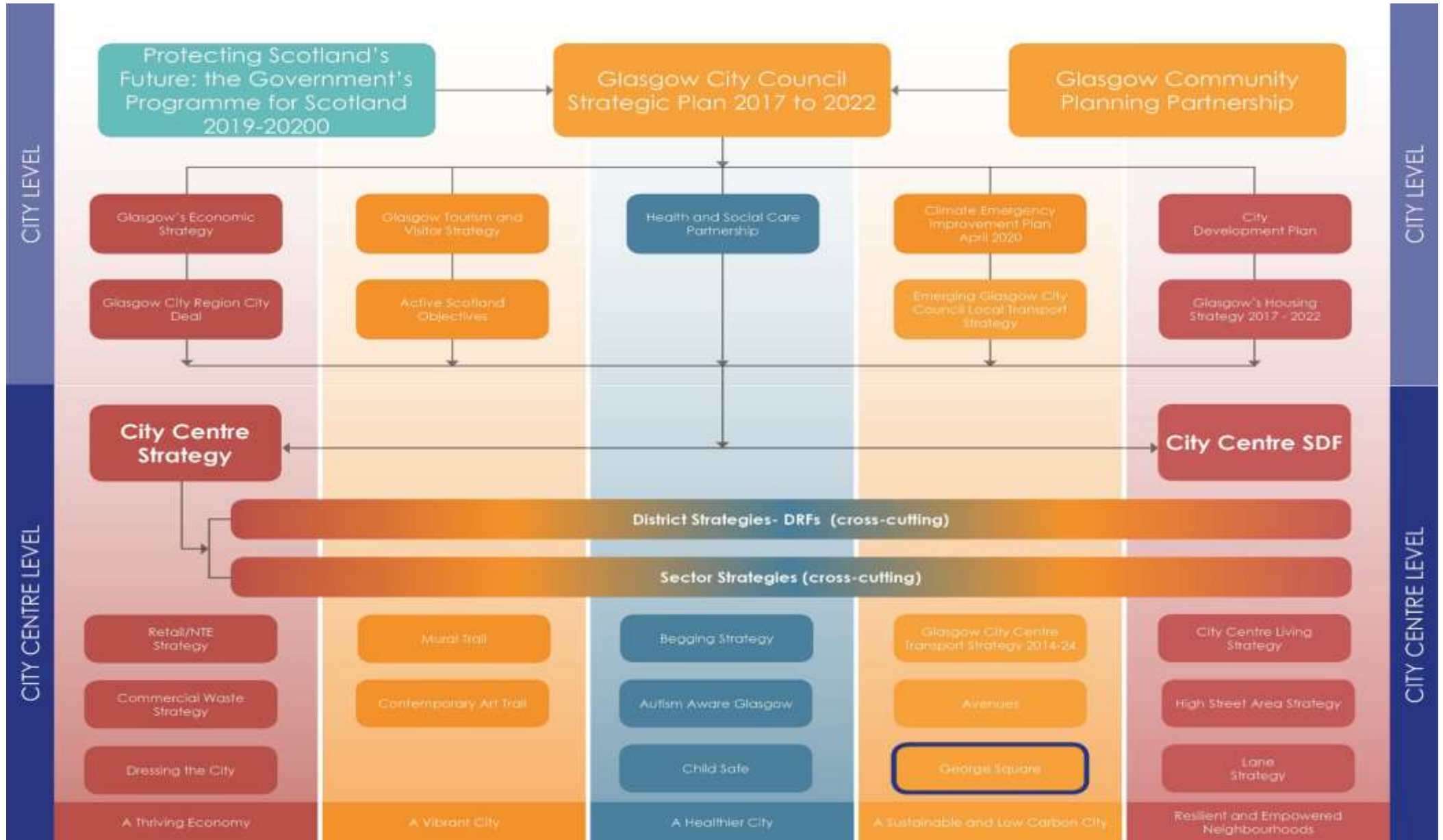
- (i) consider the contents of this report;
- (ii) note the outcome of the Public Conversation;
- (iii) approve the proposed budget for the George Square Area Strategy;
- (iv) approve the proposal to progress a TRO process for full closure of the east and west sides of George Square, with north/south public transport corridors; and

- (v) note that update reports on the progress of the George Square Area Strategy will be submitted biannually to Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm City Policy Committee.

7. LIST OF APPENDICES

- (i) **Appendix 1** City Centre Strategic Framework
- (ii) **Appendix 2** 2019 Public Conversation - recommendations
- (iii) **Appendix 3** Illustration – emerging design principles
- (iv) **Appendix 4a** Illustration – New traffic configuration with existing Square overlaid for context – View 1
- (v) **Appendix 4b** Illustration – New traffic configuration with existing Square overlaid for context – View 2

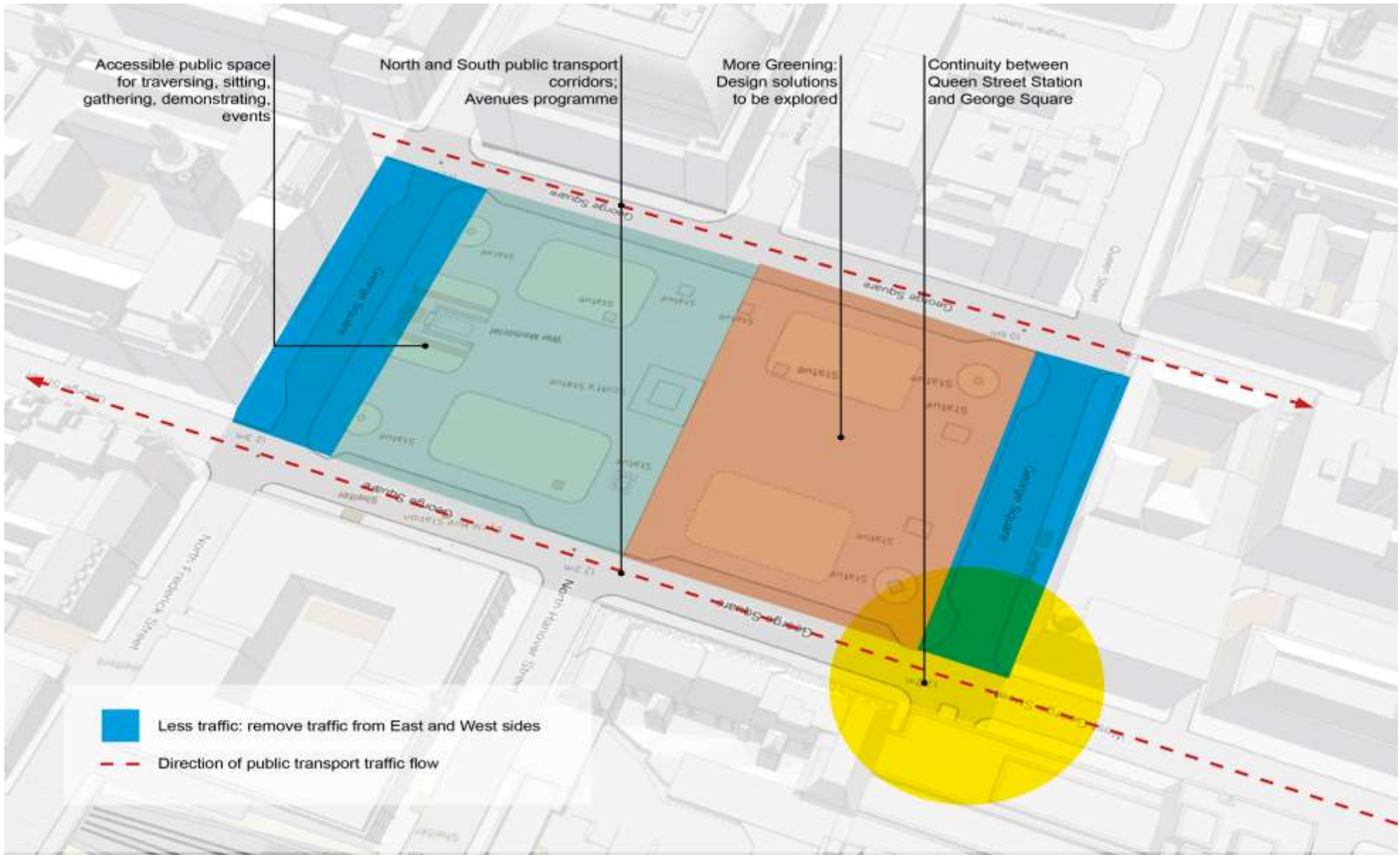
APPENDIX 1: CITY CENTRE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



APPENDIX 2: 2019 PUBLIC CONVERSATION – RECOMMENDATIONS

MANAGEMENT		DESCRIPTION	MITIGATION
A1	GSq is special – the main civic space and special place in citizens' hearts	Highest standards of management and maintenance required Event activity must benefit and be accessible to all citizens	Management Plan Event Space Strategy
A2	GSq should be a place for the common good, predominantly with free space available to anyone anytime	Public access is paramount and should not be compromised for commercial activities i.e. impact on public routes or views or heritage access	Event Space Strategy Common Good
A3	GSq is one of various event spaces and its role/function should be reflected in the programme of events	GSq events programme should be seen as constituent part of wider city centre events programme, with clear event space strategy for different spaces	Event Space Strategy
A4	GSq should offer citizens the chance to showcase Glasgow's changing creativity	Learning from Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth, space should be made available on GSq for people to make cultural or artistic statements, with curation and management support	Event Space Strategy
DESIGN		DESCRIPTION	MITIGATION
B1	Design process for the future of GSq must be rooted in public aspirations	The findings of the public conversation report should be incorporated into the design brief and form the starting point for the design process, subject to other aims and constraints (vehicle movement, emergency access, etc)	Design Strategy
B2	Design process must incorporate meaningful public engagement	Design process should include Glasgow's citizens and be conducted as transparently as possible so the public understand the options available and the reasons for making decisions that bring about changes.	Design Strategy
B3	The design itself must reflect public aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design quality must match the civic nature of the space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive space to relax, meet and socialise daytime and night-time, without having to pay • It should be a place for people not vehicles, and the presence and impact of vehicle should be minimised <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free pedestrian movement 24/7, 365 days a year, without significant diversions • Design should accommodate outdoor events and activities in line with management guidelines above, including informal protests, rallies and demonstrations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage and nature should be valued elements of the future design, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greening, flowers, water – connecting with nature - Interpreting the heritage of/around the Square - Views of key buildings around the Square, and wayfinding to explore the city further 	Design Strategy

APPENDIX 3: ILLUSTRATION – EMERGING DESIGN PRINCIPLES



APPENDIX 4A: ILLUSTRATION – NEW TRAFFIC CONFIGURATION WITH EXISTING SQUARE OVERLAID FOR CONTEXT – VIEW 1



APPENDIX 4B: ILLUSTRATION – NEW TRAFFIC CONFIGURATION WITH EXISTING SQUARE OVERLAID FOR CONTEXT – VIEW 2

