

PRESS RELEASE FRIENDS OF UNION TERRACE GARDENS Monday 19th September 2011

CITY GARDEN PROJECT - MYTH BUSTERS

Sir Ian Wood's involvement with the project:

"I am only prepared to provide up to £50 million if it has strong support from the people of Aberdeen and the North-east of Scotland... I see this as the 'people's' square with something for everyone, and how that square will be developed, both above and below ground, is open to public debate – but I personally don't see significant building above-ground or significant car parking underground."
Evening Express 11/11/2008

"This isn't about me, I don't want to be associated with this square forever, I don't want my name on it. I already have a legacy in the shape of this international business that I've been lucky enough to build as part of the North Sea oil generation. If the citizens of Aberdeen decide they don't want this city square then I'll just finish up a miserable old Aberdonian who's £50million better off."
Press and Journal 1/2/2010

The cost of the City Garden Project

" Neil Baxter, secretary of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, suggested the final price tag for Sir Ian Wood's proposed development at Union Terrace Gardens could "easily" be double its £140million budget...

In a letter obtained by the P&J, Mr. Baxter cast doubt on the assessment, warning the debacle over the Holyrood parliament ensued from a "risible" initial budget being set for the design contest.

"Considering that, in recent years, buildings of comparable scale in Aberdeen and elsewhere on straightforward urban sites have cost twice the quoted budget figure for this particularly problematic and challenging site, we would be concerned about launching a competition based on such a questionable budget," he said."
Press and Journal 14/5/2010.

Heritage

The replacement of a Victorian park with a "21st century contemporary garden" is the destruction of heritage.

"Aberdeen City Council is selling off public land for this project."

We accept that the land will not be sold. However, we have also been told that it will be leased possibly for 125 years. The building and garden will not belong to the council, it will be operated by the company / trust if it gets planning permission to build it.

"The City will be taking on-board future liabilities relating to the construction and operation of the City Garden."

We don't accept this as a myth. If the business model for TIF is wrong, then there will be insufficient business rates created to pay back a loan for £70m that Aberdeen City Council would be underwriting. We believe that the TIF proposal is very risky as there will be minimal revenue generation on site. It would depend on the city square generating significant extra business in the city centre, a proposition that is subject to a large range in uncertainty.

“The majority of Aberdeen public has voted against redeveloping Union Terrace Gardens.”

A public consultation was run two years ago whereby a significant majority (1,270) voted no to the city square project. Most of those taking part were local with less than 8% recorded as having voted from outside the Grampian region.

The ACSEF report on the consultation noted the following:

“11,943 people went on to submit formal responses that have been recorded in the statistics. This is a huge response rate when compared to similar style consultations. For example, the Edinburgh Tram consultation had just under 3,500 direct responses.”

ACSEF minutes also record the following:

“If views are roughly split there is an opportunity to say that although the public has spoken this is only in relatively small numbers. Those wishing to see the status quo are in the minority compared to those who wish to see change such as updating and modernising the gardens.”

ACSEF board minutes, 22d March 2010.

Further Comments on the wisdom of the project

“The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland secretary and treasurer Neil Baxter said the contest was ‘silly’ and lacked sufficient funds for its completion.” The Architects Journal July 2011.

“Most conventional designs tend to start with a use, before proceeding to a site and then a brief, and finally designs to enable a scheme to be built. For UTG this will effectively be reversed. This is partly because the scheme is opportunity led, but mostly because of the scale and significance of the expected design. This scheme will be, by its very nature, more akin to designing a new street in the city, than designing a new building.”

Technical Feasibility Study for the City Square Project.

Mike Shepherd

Chairman, Friends of Union Terrace Gardens

