# Expert panel unveils plans to revive upper floors of Union Street in Aberdeen



Iain Nicholas, a retail expert and founder of the Vacant Shops Academy, is leading a dedicated panel focused on revitalising the vacant spaces along Union Street, specifically its upper floors. This initiative aims at addressing the ongoing struggles faced by the Granite Mile, a prominent thoroughfare in Aberdeen that has seen a notable decline in activity and occupancy.

Nicholas, along with key figures from the local business community, including designer Richard Tinto and members from Aberdeen Inspired, has undertaken the challenging task of transforming these deserted units into viable spaces for community use. Accompanied by local councillors and city officials, the panel's exploration began with a recent visit to a dilapidated former bank building located at the top of Union Street, near the Capitol office complex.

Inside, the group encountered an environment marked by neglect, with stripped-back interiors and visible decay. "The key takeaway from today for me is that each of the upper floor spaces has their own specific opportunities and barriers,” said Ross Grant from Aberdeen Inspired, reflecting on the session's findings. The panel's inspections revealed not only the challenges posed by the physical condition of the spaces but also a potential for diverse solutions tailored to each unit.

The initiative received a significant boost earlier this year, when Aberdeen Inspired secured £15,000 in government funding aimed specifically at reinvigorating the Granite Mile. Speaking on the ambition behind the project, Nicholas remarked, “We’re starting off by thinking about what could go in these spaces? What are the barriers to that happening? How can those barriers be overcome?” His extensive background, which includes years of experience in enhancing urban areas, positions him as a valuable asset to the mission at hand.

Richard Tinto, a prominent figure in Aberdeen’s architectural landscape, is enthusiastic about the potential for revitalising Union Street. His firm is currently involved in numerous projects, including the transformation of the former John Lewis building into a multi-entertainment facility. Tinto highlighted the collaborative spirit of the panel, asserting that the group aims to streamline the process for businesses looking to establish themselves on Union Street, stating, “If we can be that ‘come together’ then that’s it.”

As the panel embarks on the lengthy process of formulating their strategies, they are also considering broader regulatory issues that have hindered development in the area. They plan to engage with Holyrood to advocate for modifications to planning policies that may impede progress.

The Granite Mile is already witnessing some revitalisation efforts, with plans for a new golf facility by Golf Academy Scotland and a major redevelopment project by Edinburgh-based Optimal Student. The latter aims to convert the upper floors of So..NYC into 25 student flats, further diversifying the use of these spaces.

Although the task of reinvigorating Union Street's upper floors presents significant challenges, the collaborative approach of the panel illustrates a committed effort to explore new ideas and foster community engagement. While time will tell whether their ambitions will materialise successfully, the groundwork is being laid for a potential renaissance of one of Aberdeen's key thoroughfares.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/bid-bring-new-life-upper-9069390> - This article discusses Aberdeen Inspired receiving £15,000 in funding from Aberdeen City Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to conduct a feasibility study on the Granite Mile's upper floors, aiming to assess underused spaces and potential usage, aligning with the initiative to revitalise Union Street's upper floors.
2. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/action-plan-bring-empty-shops-back-use-union-street-approved> - This source details the approval of a £500,000 grant scheme by Aberdeen City Council to support reconfiguring empty shops on Union Street, part of an action plan to reinvigorate the area, which is relevant to the efforts to address the decline in activity and occupancy on Union Street.
3. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/fresh-450000-fund-union-street> - This article announces a £450,000 fund from Aberdeen City Council to support repair and restoration of traditional roofs, chimneys, rainwater goods, and shopfronts on Union Street, contributing to the broader revitalisation efforts of the area.
4. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/four-businesses-helped-already-union-street-empty-shops-action-plan> - This source reports on four businesses, including a fashion boutique, coffee takeaway, watch retailer, and restaurant/takeaway, receiving support through the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme, demonstrating the initiative's impact on transforming vacant units into viable spaces for community use.
5. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/ps500000-scheme-launches-today-union-street-regeneration> - This article details the launch of a £500,000 scheme by Aberdeen City Council to help building owners and new or potential tenants regenerate buildings on Union Street, offering grants of up to 50% of project costs for internal reconfiguration of vacant shops, supporting the revitalisation of Union Street's upper floors.
6. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/new-shops-union-street-thanks-acc-grants> - This source reports on six new traders opening on Union Street in the last year, thanks to the £195,000 Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme, helping to reduce the number of vacant units and contributing to the revitalisation of the area.
7. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/aberdeen-aberdeenshire/6746926/union-street-upper-floors-expert-panel/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data