
Finding a cure for growing pains

Growth comes in various forms. Extending, broadening, heightening, developing; but the common thread is the process of increasing in size. It is a change process.

Right now, there are people working hard to drive growth with the shared aim of making Aberdeen the amazing, unique 21st century city region we can be proud to bequeath to future generations.

However, it appears that this is not going to happen without significant pain. There are groups hell bent on sabotaging the progress. Whinging, complaining, protesting, slowing. Their default position is 'No'. 'Yeah shall not change'. You probably know some of them. It is a small, we think, but noisy minority.

To enable our economic renaissance vision to be realised, we need people and organisations to bring investment, innovation, skills and jobs here. And to retain those we already have. We are operating in a highly competitive international space, and if we continue to send out the message that Aberdeen is complacent, change averse, slow and not really open for business they will simply choose elsewhere.

Sometimes it's worth stepping back and taking a look at yourself through the eyes of others. What do people from elsewhere think about this place and what we do?

A few months ago, I was speaking to a guy in Leeds. He represented a potential major inward investor in the retail sector. I was working hard to talk up our economic outlook. He had a copy of our investment tracker and seemed impressed. But then he said, and I quote: "Why should my client believe any of that when it's taken you 50 years to build a road and your football team can't even get a new stadium"? Whether this was a correct or incorrect perception of this region, it was his reality.

As we in-fight and naval gaze, other city regions in the UK and beyond- our competitors- continue to move forward; making bold decisions; re-inventing themselves; replacing old industry sectors; embracing culture; getting on with stuff; creating exciting modern city centres where people want to be. And talking themselves up into the bargain. Their citizens choose to get behind this, not descend into civil war over every detail.

One example that is regularly raised with me is "look what Dundee has done". Yes indeed, the waterfront redevelopment and new V&A museum is a fantastic scheme. It represents a £1bn investment and has galvanised the people of the area to be willing participants in the change journey. To the extent that it was last year actually named by the Wall Street Journal "Scotland's coolest city" and one of the world's top 10 places to visit.

Can you imagine if this had been proposed to be replicated in Aberdeen? We'd have had the Civic Society complaining of the loss of architecturally significant 1970's brutalist buildings. And Community Councils lobbying against it on the grounds that all those pesky tourists would cause traffic chaos.

The aforementioned Tracker tells us that current and planned infrastructure and regeneration investment in this region is around £9bn, dwarfing Dundee's £1bn, so these should be exciting times. Yet we still seem to have this in-built reticence to change, progress and talking positively about ourselves.

So, what's this got to do with me, you ask?

If you are part of our silent majority, we need to hear you. If you think that this is already a great place to live and work, please challenge those who are knocking it and start to say so.

We have to find reasons to do things. Not to not do them! You might not like every detail of every scheme, but if you agree that we need to progress as a place, please voice your support and do your bit to drown out the naysayers. The clock is ticking. We need to up the pace. This is something we owe to our children and grandchildren.



Open letter from

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