

Edinburgh – constantly changing

by Roddy Smith Chief Executive of Essential Edinburgh the city centre BID.

In the last four years since I joined Essential Edinburgh, the pace of change in our historic city centre has been both constant and hugely exciting. Our buoyant tourist and visitor industry, coupled with Edinburgh performing very well across any number of economic benchmarks has led to the re-development of many sites and buildings, bringing a new purpose to empty spaces and derelict buildings alike.

This dramatic change is visible throughout our city centre landscape, stretching from a reimaged Edinburgh St James and Edinburgh Grand hotel, in the former National Bank of Scotland headquarters, in the east end to the recently announced Johnnie Walker Visitor Experience in the former House of Fraser building in the West End.



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Edinburgh is a city with world heritage status, as well as a population of over 513,000 people that welcomes nearly 4 million visitors a year, as such it is our duty to protect it. New developments and refurbishments give our historic buildings, which hold memories for so many people, a fresh lease of life ensuring their legacy will not be forgotten.

With tourist numbers continuing to grow there is no reason to predict that these building developments will not maintain their upward trend in the future, in fact many businesses are looking to expand their current city locations or to relocate to Edinburgh.

One of the major catalysts for change has, of course, been Edinburgh St James. This transformational development, the largest new retail construction in the UK, will provide a focus for the east end and will attract both residents and tourists, while also creating new jobs and opportunities.

The east end of the city centre has been further enhanced by a number of new hotels, like the stunning new Edinburgh Grand, redeveloping previously vacant spaces, reinvigorating derelict buildings and restoring a part of our city's history. New office space has also been created in St Andrew's Square and the proposals for the world class IMPACT concert hall nearby will cement the area's importance and continue to ensure Edinburgh's reputation as a cultural hub.

The good news is also spreading west, with Princes, George and Rose Street complimenting the new developments in the east and spreading footfall across the city. The former BHS building on Princes Street is now under construction for a new retail and leisure development, which upon completion will be enjoyed by tourists and residents alike.

Recently, Diageo announced new details around its plan to redevelop the former House of Fraser building to become the Johnnie Walker visitor experience, an imaginative and exciting

use of the historic building. This multi-million-pound investment in Edinburgh will transform the empty site, adding a major visitor attraction to our city's already impressive portfolio and driving footfall.

Edinburgh is growing as a tourist destination, and although the increase in visitors is both welcome and vital for our economy, we need to recognise the historic nature of our city and be sympathetic when we breathe new life into old buildings as well as with the construction of new ones. This I believe we are achieving with a balanced range of developments for business, leisure and tourism.