Document Pack

Democratic Services Section
Chief Executive's Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

Friday, 20th August, 2010

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Dear Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room (Room G05), City Hall on Wednesday, 25th August, 2010 at 4.30 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully

PETER McNANEY

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

    (a) Apologies

2. Association of Public Service Excellence Awards (Pages 1 - 2)

3. Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework (Pages 3 - 54)

4. Local Economic Development Plan (Pages 55 - 88)

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Agenda Item 2

Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Association of Public Service Excellence – Service Awards
Date:	25 August 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, Ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Tim Husbands, Head of City Events and Venues, Ext 1400

Relevant Background Information

In September, the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) will be holding its annual seminar for local authorities and their public sector partners across the United Kingdom. This year, the seminar will be held in L/Derry and is called "*Armageddon or managed transformation: Where to next for Local Government's Front Line?*" The seminar will cover a broad agenda and explore how local government sustains excellence in service delivery in this period of financial constraints. The draft programme is attached, and there are also sessions for elected representatives.

The APSE Service Awards Dinner, which takes place at this seminar, has been taking place for more than ten years and provides the United Kingdom's local government with an opportunity to gain recognition for their work in terms of service delivery.

Key Issues

The Department has now been made aware that the Waterfront and Ulster Hall Service team has again been shortlisted as one of eight council services under the APSE awards category for "*best service team – Sports Leisure and Culture*". As a national finalist, we have therefore been invited to attend the seminar and awards ceremony.

It is therefore recommended that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman (or their nominees) and the Director of Development and Head of City Events and Venues be granted approval to attend the event, to enable them to be present at the service awards ceremony.

Resource Implications

<u>Financial</u>

Awards Dinner fee per person - £119
Accommodation per person – 1 night - c£70

There is allowance in the current Service revenue estimates to cover this expenditure, as well as mileage costs to the conference.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to grant approval for the Chairman and Deputy Chairman (or his nominees) and the Director of Development and Head of City Events and Venues to attend the APSE service awards dinner.

Key to Abbreviations

APSE – Association for Public Service Excellence

Decision Tracking

The Head of City Events and Venues will liaise with APSE to make the appropriate bookings.

Documents Attached

None

Agenda Item 3

Belfast City Council

Report to:	Special Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014
Date:	25 August 2010
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459
Contact Officer:	Kerrie Sweeney, Tourism, Culture & Arts Manager, ext 3586

Relevant Background Information

The draft Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014 was agreed by Development Committee on 29 January 2010. It was agreed that the framework would go out for a four week consultation process, which began on the 2 March 2010.

Over 700 organisations and individuals were contacted as part of the consultation exercise and signposted to a pro forma on Belfast City Council's website (with links to Northern Ireland Tourist Board website). Presentations were offered on request.

Twenty five responses were received via the pro forma on the website and three presentations requested. Overall the responses have been positive as a whole with the exception being a number of responses from organisations in West Belfast. See Appendix 2.

Key Issues

The main changes that will be made to the Framework are as follows:

West Belfast

The Tourism, Culture and Arts Manager met with a wide forum of representatives of West Belfast to discuss concerns and worked with a smaller sub group to review areas of the Framework and agree a way forward.

Belfast Tourism Monitor – 2009 Figures

As part of the Belfast City Council's Belfast Tourism Monitor, the 2009 figures were presented to Committee in June. This shows a 30% increase in visitor numbers to Belfast in 2009, with a staggering 9.25 million visitor trips undertaken, worth £651 million to the local economy. The Framework must also be updated to reflect these figures.

Maps and Targets
The maps outlining Tourism Place Destinations will be updated so as all places are identified as opposed to arrows pointing off the page. Targets have yet to be aligned to Northern Ireland, however NITB is aware and supportive of this approach. Targets can be revised during the term of the Framework.

Visionary Drivers
The Framework identifies six visionary drivers for tourism growth which are capital projects to be delivered in partnership with government. These are:

- Titanic / Maritime Heritage
- Integrated conference and exhibition facilities
- Belfast Hills and Belfast Zoo
- Lagan Canal
- National Art Gallery
- Crumlin Road Goal

The response from party briefings and from the general feedback has been extremely supportive of the concept of the Belfast Story which was listed as a development lever as opposed to visionary driver. Most consultees felt that this merited significant capital investment and should be upgraded to a visionary driver. Belfast Hills will be strengthened to demonstrate a link to West Belfast and not just the Zoo. A National Art Gallery will be included as a Development Lever as opposed to a Visionary Driver and will include a caveat regarding the funding climate and the likelihood this is a longer term aspiration for DCAL.

Way Forward – 2010 Priorities
NITB, BVCB and BCC have met to agree key projects to progress in short to medium term. These are:

1. Titanic Maritime Belfast and Titanic 2012
2. Belfast Hills/Belfast Zoo
3. Integrated Events Strategy between NITB/BCC
4. Belfast Story
5. Integrated Visitor Servicing /Marketing Plan between BVCB / BCC and NITB
6. NITB and BCC Tourism targets and research aligned
7. City Event Planner launched for sector to plan/optimise opportunities
8. Launch of a new Belfast Pass
9. Solution for integrated exhibition / conference facilities
10. Conference Subvention Scheme
11. Relocation of BWC
12. Local Tourism Destinations - Audits of areas undertaken and partnerships established
13. Lagan Canal – medium term future agreed

A more detailed action plan must be developed against each of these themes and resources allocated, however it is important to note that progress has already been made against many of the areas outlined and each organisation has adopted these in their individual work plans where appropriate. For example:

Titanic Maritime Belfast and Titanic 2012
BCC's Tourism Culture and Arts Unit has taken the lead in commissioning a Maritime Heritage Study for Belfast in partnership with NITB and DSD, levering £20,000 to support the study.

Work has commenced on Titanic 2012 and BCC (via Events Unit) is supporting NITB to prepare a Business Plan to bid for central government support towards 2012 activities.

Belfast Hills/Belfast Zoo
TCA is working with Belfast Hills Partnership to submit an application for Rural Development Funds. BCC's Parks and Leisure Department has commissioned a study to review the future of Floral Hall.

Belfast Story
TCA is working closely with Facilities Management and Good Relations to identify the potential of incorporating elements of the Belfast Story into the City Hall. TCA is also working closely with the Titanic Foundation Ltd to ensure that the content within the Titanic Signature Project (Titanic-Belfast) reflects the wider Belfast Story

Integrated Events Strategy between NITB/BCC
BCC's Events Unit is in the process of finalising an Events Strategy for Belfast and NITB has just gone out to consultation with their Events Plan for major event funding. There is a conscious effort to ensure that these two documents are working in harmony.

Integrated Visitor Servicing /Marketing Plan between BVCB / BCC and NITB
NITB has agreed their Service Level Agreement with BVCB for 2010 worth approximately £600,000 BVCB has agreed to a new process in developing plans for 2011 and beyond, which will be based on a more integrated approach for the city as opposed to their corporate approach. This will better align BCC's Events Unit, TCA and Corporate Communications activities and achieve better efficiencies.

NITB and BCC Tourism targets and research aligned
The TCA Unit has tendered for the delivery of the Belfast Tourism Monitor 2010 – 2013 and NITB has been consulted throughout this process to ensure that national statistics feed into the Belfast model and again achieve greater efficiencies.

Solution for integrated exhibition / conference facilities
The need for Belfast to have new facilities is flagged within the NI Tourism Strategy 2020 and NITB are currently putting a case together to bid for £7.5 million under the next CSR. The Waterfront and Ulster Halls are leading on this project and commissioning a business case to identify most appropriate option for investment.

Conference Subvention Scheme
The Development Committee, through TCA, has agreed to ring fence £70,000 per annum over next 3 years towards conference subvention and NITB have agreed to match this with £75,000 per annum. This will create a Belfast and Northern Ireland Conference Subvention Fund worth £435,000 to attract larger conferences to the city.

Relocation of Belfast Welcome Centre
BVCB has prepared a business plan for the relocation and this project is currently being assessed within the context of Belfast City Council's Capital Projects Priorities. A number of premises have been identified and reviewed with the former Northern Bank Building opposite the City Hall being the most favoured. NITB have received an application for capital support, however there is no commitment as yet to financial support. Their most recent Visitor Information Strategy for Northern Ireland highlights how successful the Belfast Welcome Centre is in its gateway role for Northern Ireland.

Local Tourism Destinations - Audits of areas undertaken and partnerships established
Nine Local Tourism Destinations are identified in the Framework. This approach has

been developed to support tourism growth across the City and allow a more structured engagement between the Council and neighbourhood areas. Audits and action plans must be developed for all nine areas.

Lagan Canal – medium term future agreed
The Lagan Canal has undergone an economic appraisal and £1 million secured from Ulster Garden Villages. Approaches have been made to SIB, DCAL and DSD to identify possible sources of funding.

Next steps
Once agreed by Council, the following actions will be undertaken:

1. The Framework will be uploaded on the Council's website with consultation responses and the actions taken to address these responses. A shorter summary document will be published.

2. A Belfast Tourism Forum will be established (Autumn 2010), chaired by the Lord Mayor and will include key private and public sector stakeholders to play a key role in overseeing the delivery of the Framework. The first meeting will be an opportunity to launch the document to the wider industry and demonstrate the achievements identified above. A key output of the forum will be to agree a four year action plan.

3. Workshop(s) will be organised to progress the Local Tourism Destination concept across the City. A number of smaller initiatives will be identified for support across the Local Tourism Destinations to ensure buy-in from local stakeholders.

Resource Implications

£20,000 to publish and launch the Framework
£40,000 to progress the Local Tourism Destinations

All from existing Tourism, Culture and Arts Budget as agreed in Departmental Plan 2010 /2011.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members agree:-

1. To the changes proposed via consultation, to the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014
2. To publish and launch a summarised version of the Framework, with the full report available on line
3. That a Belfast Tourism Forum be established to oversee implementation of the Framework, chaired by Lord Mayor
4. That workshops are organised to further progress the Tourism Place Destinations and a number of local initiatives identified for support.

Decision Tracking

1. First Meeting of Belfast Tourism Forum
Time line: October 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay ext 3459

2. Published Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014
Time line: October 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay ext 3459

3. Local Tourism Destination workshop(s)
Time line: March 2011 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay ext 3459

Key Abbreviations	
BCC	Belfast City Council
TCA	Tourism Culture and Arts
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
BVCB	Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
DCAL	Department of Culture Arts and Leisure
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
SIB	Strategic Investment Board
DSD	Department of Social Development

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Copy of the Framework
Appendix 2 – Summary of Consultee Responses and proposed action

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Appendix 1

Final Draft

BELFAST TOURISM: GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

An Integrated Strategic Framework for

Belfast Tourism
2010 - 2014

BELFAST: A LEADING CITY TOURISM DESTINATION AND GATEWAY

In recent years, Belfast has built up a reputation as an international destination for city tourism visits. It has also become a key gateway for tourists visiting Northern Ireland and the whole of the island of Ireland. Latest figures suggest that visits to the city are worth up to £451m per year for the local economy, supporting 10,000 jobs in the Greater Belfast area. In 2009, the city attracted 1.7m staying visits, 7.6m day visits and 64,000 cruise passengers (and crew).

To build on the momentum achieved so far, the priority now is to raise Belfast's tourism to a higher level. It has the potential to offer much more to visitors and to attract them in much greater numbers. By doing this, tourism will make an even greater contribution to the local and wider economies and enhance the benefits it generates for businesses, citizens and communities.

Belfast has seen much change in the last 10 years. Its economy has blossomed and its physical appearance has been reshaped in many parts. It is now better placed to perform its role as Northern Ireland's regional driver than has been the case at any time in its post industrial history. With this up-turn in fortunes, Belfast has renewed confidence as a business hub and as a contemporary urban visitor experience.

Earlier in 2009, the City Council referred to this period of change as being the 'rebirth' of Belfast. With reference to a series of public investment projects, including the refurbishment of City Hall, Ulster Museum and Ulster Hall and the prospect of the £97m investment in the Titanic Signature Project, the Lord Mayor declared that the city had experienced "a year like no other..." and that Belfast is a "**vibrant city full of opportunity, inspiring enterprise, creativity and change**....". This is a confident statement of what the city now represents and shows the enthusiasm with which it is looking to its future.

The confidence of the city covers all its parts including the 'outer areas' where tourism has grown in the most challenging circumstances. The West Belfast Festival has developed into international significance and many tourists take the opportunity to visit places that are steeped in recent history. Local information points such as An Culturlann in West Belfast or the Spectrum Centre in the Greater Shankill area are providing a sign posting service for visitors seeking local, authentic experiences. East Belfast has been successful in attracting significant investment into Titanic Quarter and the Connswater Greenway project which will open up new spaces and unlock much of Belfast's rich heritage and local stories. Queen's Quarter and the new Lyric Theatre support South Belfast to showcase some of Belfast's finest cultural talent whilst North Belfast continues to attract over 200,000 visitors to Belfast Zoo year on year with a range of potential projects in the pipeline to encourage day trippers to stay longer in the local area.

It is important that the city ensures that citizens across all parts will share in the success that development will bring. Tourism, like all major components of public and economic policy, has a role to play in enabling these benefits to reach communities across the city. This is reflected throughout the proposals contained in this strategy.

THE BELFAST BRAND

This is an exciting time for Belfast and Northern Ireland where major research projects throughout 2008 and 2009 have developed a new city and regional brands. Both brands lie at the heart of this strategy. The Belfast Brand communicates that we are a dynamic city with a big personality, proud of our heritage, vibrant, energetic, providing a vivid memorable experience. This study provides the framework for Belfast's tourism sector; public, private and voluntary to deliver the brand experience and position Belfast within the top twenty city destinations in Europe.

The Belfast Brand Proposition is of a city in which *'A unique history and a future full of promise have come together to create a city bursting with energy and optimism'.*

The core values of the brand are:

- *A dynamic city with a big personality between the mountains and the sea*
- *A city proud of its heritage... is alive with possibilities and open to change ... vibrant, energetic and exciting*
- *The people of Belfast provide a welcome which is not just warm, but genuine and generous, inviting anyone and everyone to join in*
- *Belfast provides a vivid and memorable experience with new things to discover every time you visit*

The motivating appeals of the brand are: *heritage & culture, authenticity, welcoming people, distinctive character, relaxed style, discovery, natural countryside, water and urban environments*.

The Northern Ireland brand harmonises with the Belfast proposition. Its core message is: '*Northern Ireland Confidently Moving On'.* It is supported by the twin themes of: '*Experience our Awakening'* and '*Uncover Our Stories'*.
The appeals presented are of a dynamic changing destination with an underlying interesting and compelling history and traditions – shared with engaging people. The core values – like the Belfast brand – are based on: *discovery, character, people and heritage.*
Tourism Ireland's brand used overseas for Belfast and Northern Ireland is also in harmony – '*The island of unique character and characters'.*

Thus, the brand promises and characteristics all revolve around *experiences, people, character, authenticity and discovery.*

This strategic framework ensures that the appeals of the brands motivate all aspects of tourism development, servicing and marketing. Without such a focus then investment may not deliver relevant products or services that meet the promises of the brands and associated marketing. The Belfast brand key motivational appeals of *heritage & culture, authenticity, welcoming people, distinctive character* point to the reality that *culture* in all its many aspects must lie at the heart of the tourism framework if the brand promise is to be delivered.

THE VISION
This is an integrated framework between Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Our vision for this document is to work together in delivering our brand promise to our visitors;

> ***Belfast, working in partnership, will deliver the authentic European city experience by developing and co-ordinating our cultural, natural and commercial assets to attract a greater number of visitors to the city and maximise the economic benefits for Belfast and Northern Ireland.***

In elaborating upon this vision, Belfast will:

- develop a strong reputation as a vibrant capital city with unique and exciting experiences that, once visited and enjoyed, will compel return visits time and time again;
- spread the economic benefits of tourism across the whole city;
- offer a broader range of access services – air, sea, road and rail;
- consolidate its position as a welcoming gateway for tourists to Northern Ireland and the island as a whole;
- enhance its position as a business tourism destination;
- stage a consistent annual programme of events and festivals – including a major high quality one each year and especially those that are unique to Belfast;
- possess much improved services and facilities, including easier means of moving around; more accommodation options; and an upgraded array of shopping, catering and entertainment facilities; and
- offer all with a distinctive Belfast flavour, in an environment of attractive and ambient urban and natural spaces.

*It is emphasised that the Vision for tourism in the city is underpinned by Belfast City Council and NITB's commitment to **sustainability**. This means sustainability in terms of the environment, of the economy and of the people. Sustainable tourism is defined as a process which meets the needs of the present tourists and host communities whilst protecting and enhancing needs in the future. This principle lies at the heart of this Framework.*

THE CURRENT VISITOR EXPERIENCE

While a high proportion of incoming staying visitors to Belfast are on business trips (28%) or on a visit to friends and relatives (28%), those coming for leisure purposes (holidays or short breaks) have shown the greatest growth in recent years (now 60%) Visitors are attracted by Belfast's culture and heritage and its current novelty appeal as a city on the way up. The successes and shortcomings of the current visitor experience, as identified by visitor surveys, consultations, workshops and comparisons with other cities can be summarised as follows:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Existing attractions (incl. City Hall, Ulster Museum, Belfast Zoo, Crown Bar, Queen's, Botanic Gardens, St George's Market, St Anne's Cathedral, Stormont, W5)	Needs more things to do and see – to build on Belfast's own distinctiveness
City Centre shopping and independent retail product in neighbourhood areas	Public places and streetscapes are not consistent in quality
Odyssey Complex	Lack of café culture
Tours – by bus, black taxi and walking – often linked to recent history	City presentation – needs further investment – banners, public art etc
Conflict resolution experience	
Range of hotel provision	Restricted range of eating out options + price and value
Historic Built Environment	
The Belfast Welcome Centre	Potential Shortage of B&Bs, guest houses, boutique hotels and aparthotels
Interaction with locals – their friendliness	Poor transport links between attractions and tourist facilities
Nightlife and traditional entertainment	Limited street entertainment and animation
	Transport links to Outer Areas
Festivals and events (including concerts and performances e.g. Féile an Phobail, Ulster Orchestra at the Ulster Hall)	No integrated conference and exhibition facilities
Wide range of culture and art	Only accommodation rated for quality standards
	Customer service could be improved
Parks and Green Spaces/Open Spaces	Lack of co-ordinated approach between tourism and arts sectors
Accessibility by sea, air and rail	Perception that July and Sundays remain closed to visitors (often not reality) – need more open at Easter
	Marketing and promotion – too many messages – needs more co-ordination
Still relatively new up and coming city to visit – Lonely Planet listing	
Opportunities	**Threats**
Belfast Brand	Air and sea routes reducing
Titanic Quarter Regeneration	Business Travel is falling
Connswater Community Greenway	Security and safety perceptions
Belfast Story - waiting to be told, including our history, music, culture and industrial heritage	Expensive compared to other destinations e.g. hotel rates at peak times
Range of development opportunities e.g. Crumlin Road Goal, Floral Hall, Carlisle Methodist Church	Racial and sectarian violence
	New buildings and development not developed to architectural excellence
Gaeltacht Quarter	
Greater Accessibility to cultural events and programmes	
New developments in music and literary tourism	
Maritime Heritage and Titanic Signature Attraction	
Packaging products (e.g. events, restaurant/entertainment deal)	
Number of free experiences	
Family and Friends	
New technology to access information and purchase goods	

There has been great momentum in undertaking significant projects that will benefit tourism. Recent projects completed or due for completion soon include or in the Ulster Hall reopening (March 2009); the Tall Ships (2009); City Hall refurbishment (2009); Ulster Museum reopening (2009); St Anne's Square and the MAC (2011); the Lyric Theatre (2011); The Titanic Signature Project and associated developments (2012); The Gaeltacht Quarter and current improvements to street environments. There is a good hotel base for the city which is still expanding and good orientation for the visitor. It is a compact city and the current 'streets ahead' project is improving the fabric of the city centre.

Investment planned or under way in the city centre by both the public and private sectors amounts to some £1billion of projects. Outside the inner city area a further £0.7billion is also at planning or implementation stage.

All of these will undoubtedly boost the city's tourism appeal but more is needed. The Belfast Brand, 2008 concluded *"A unique history and a future full of promise have come together to create a city bursting with energy and optimism"*. The time to build upon that brand proposition is now.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES
If Belfast is to compete effectively with other European cities, the challenge is to adopt an innovative approach which provides a unique and satisfying visitor experience, appealing to selected source markets throughout the year. Hence, Belfast will differentiate itself from being simply another place to visit and become a compelling city destination and gateway.

The main challenges or risks perceivable at this time to the future growth scenarios for Belfast tourism are:

- Economic Uncertainty & Downturn – the severe recession of 2008/9 appears to be easing and the prospects for the next five years are much brighter than they appeared a year ago. However there is still uncertainty and travel across the world has suffered and continues to do so. One positive comes from much increased domestic market activity and ROI short breaks. The GB market remains challenging.

- Investment – Private Sector – the economic crisis severely affected most banks and lending remains constrained. The length of this constraint is not known, but it is certain that lending conditions will remain tighter than ever before and private investment must inevitably suffer. It may take several years before confidence for further new hotel investment reappears;

- Investment – Public Sector – the downturn has impacted here too but there is confidence in continuing investment in key tourism related projects;

- Increased competition – as ever, this remains a threat to future growth if Belfast falls behind its competitors. Most, however, are likely to be operating under similar constraints to Belfast, at least for some years;

- Restricted access – this is a threat that is emerging as direct air route access to Belfast from major European destinations is reduced. This impacts on Belfast's Gateway role;

- Exchange Rates – Belfast's retail sector benefitted in recent years from increased numbers of shopping visitors from across the border due to Sterling's decline against the Euro. However, the downside was that the number of GB visitors to Ireland fell and this impacted negatively on the holiday visitors to Northern Ireland who may have entered through ROI. Although Sterling has now regained value against the Euro the number of GB visitors to ROI continues to fall significantly which will impact on Northern Ireland too. The rise of Sterling (coupled with the planned VAT increase for January 2011) will impact negatively on ROI shopping visitor numbers;

- Image – Belfast's new image as a major tourism city recommended in every guide must be maintained and confirmed. Incidents of unrest or violence that undermine this hard-won image could do enormous damage to the attractiveness of the city as a major tourism destination. Images of riots in July 2010 were viewed around the world due to '24 hour rolling news'.

- Other Risks – air travel suffered dramatically in April/May 2010 due to the eruption of the new Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland. Flights to Belfast suffered and visitor numbers fell as they did all over the UK and Ireland. Hopefully such disruptions will be rare in the future but the event illustrates the 'out of the blue' events that can adversely impact tourism.

MOTIVATION, MARKETS AND TARGETS

Motivation

The motivations to visit cities are many and complex, reflecting the diverse interests and segmentation of the market for travel. While 'culture and sightseeing' is frequently cited as the main motivation for urban visits, and might well be the primary appeal for many, not all visitors would regard themselves as cultural tourists. The motivation to visit city destinations can range from general sightseeing to attending an event to going shopping, depending on the consumer's needs at a particular time. Research would suggest that successful cities not only project a range of both heritage and living cultural attractions, including some of iconic status, but also meet the tourist's expectations on a set of essential facilities and attractions integral to a city visit. In summary:

- For some visitors, culture is the prime reason for travel, while for others the appeal is more to do with the ambiance, 'decor', 'atmosphere' and authenticity of the city - especially the cultural heritage. **The intangible elements of culture, including lifestyle and creative industries, are becoming increasingly important in distinguishing between cities** and providing reasons to visit. In both cases, culture plays an important, but very different role.

- A large number of city trippers do not see themselves as (city) cultural tourists. **Research would suggest that only about one in four city tourists rate culture as their prime motivator, but much more are actually involved in cultural activities while on a city trip**.

- For some cities, the concept of the creative city, linking the traditional cultural attractions, services and heritage with the creative industries such as media and entertainment, design, architecture and fashion, is of particular appeal in attracting visitors. **Creative tourism – visitors participate in experiences with local communities**.

- **Cultural (mega) events and festivals offer interesting opportunities for city destinations in attracting both first time and repeat visitors**.

- With the increasing globalization and mass production leading to greater uniformity worldwide, **the value of authenticity and distinctiveness is increasingly appealing to potential visitors.** Uniqueness is a key objective for any city that wants to promote itself as a tourist destination, especially in the face of growing competition.

- **Popular city tourism destinations often have iconic features or landmarks that visitors associate with them**. Towers and viewpoints (including wheels and higher ground) are also a common feature of the attractions on offer to city tourists.

- **The most popular activities undertaken by city visitors during their trips are sightseeing (including tours) and visiting places / objects of interest, followed by sauntering about and enjoying the atmosphere, eating and drinking and shopping.**

- The most important traditional cultural activity for city tourists is **visiting museums and galleries**. Although there are some differences which seem to relate to differing interpretation of cultural activities. Research has shown that there is a disparity between those who say that they are motivated by culture and museum visits and those that actually do visit them. Considerably fewer visitors take part in a cultural visit during their trip than those who say they will do so.

- **It is also clear that visits to events, such as arts performances and festivals are important in the activity mix for various niches within the overall travel market.**

- **Attendance at theatres during city trips tends to be much lower, because of the problems associated with obtaining tickets and language barriers.**

Belfast enjoys a vibrant mainstream and alternative arts scene, comprising contemporary, traditional and popular cultural production. Belfast is a city of poets, writers, painters, visual artists and dramatists, many using the medium of the Irish Language or Ulster Scots. The idea of discovery is appealing to the visitor. The challenge for Belfast is to make visible what already exists under the surface of the city's life. There is a need to harness the sum of the parts of the city; which means:

- Maximise the effectiveness and accessibility of existing infrastructure
- Maximise enjoyment and appreciation of home grown arts and cultural product
- Support and Increase levels and quality of programming output

Markets

City tourism in Western Europe is forecast to continue to expand at a rate faster than the overall travel market, at least in the short to mid-term. The best prospects for Belfast tourism will continue to be the people who holiday in the island of Ireland as 'sightseers and culture seekers', those who come for business reasons, those taking short breaks and those on day visits. The main sources and prospects are

Source Markets	Prospects
Great Britain	For the foreseeable future, it will continue to be the largest source of staying visits to Belfast (for leisure, business, and conferences). Holiday visitors to Northern Ireland fell by nearly 40% in 2009 reflecting the fall in ROI from GB. The 'staycation' effect in GB does not include a Northern Ireland benefit.
Republic of Ireland	**Overnight visitor volumes doubled in 2009 (influenced by the weakness of sterling against the euro). For the first time the ROI market has overtaken the GB market, respectively accounting for 52% and 32% of overnight visitors. There is scope for this market** to reach its full potential as a source of staying visits to Belfast even with the current rise in Sterling. The best prospects are people in pre and post family life stages.
Northern Ireland	**The domestic market will continue to be important, particularly for day trips with 77% of the total 7.6 million day trip market coming from Northern Ireland residents.(the number of indigenous overnight visitors decreased by 30% in 2009 but the net spend grew by 19%) . The main purposes will continue to be shopping, personal and professional visits, attendance at events, entertainment, etc.**
Europe	Selective markets in mainland Europe with direct air access to Belfast offer a new opportunity to attract increasing numbers of city break and gateway tourists to the city while an opportunity exists in attracting more visitors on a trip to Ireland to include a stay in Belfast. Investment in further development of the European source markets should be undertaken in line with the establishment of viable and sustained air services on selected routes.
Other Overseas	Belfast also has the potential to attract more visitors from North America and other long-haul markets. While an opportunity exists in attracting more visitors to include a stay in Belfast as part of an island of Ireland and/or Northern Ireland touring trip, expansion of direct air services would considerably boost the potential.

Targets

Sustained growth in Belfast tourism will depend on a sharper focus on those market segments which offer the best potential. Such a targeted approach will secure the best return on marketing investment. The growth targets proposed for Belfast tourism, for staying visitors over the next 5 years, are:

Growth Targets	2008	Low		Medium		High	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Total Overnight Visitors	1.6M	20	1.92M	30	2.08M	40	2.24M
Holiday Visitors	0.5M	40	0.71M	50	0.77 M	60	0.82M
Nights	5.1M	10	5.6M	15	5.85M	20	6.1M
Spend	£201M	10	£231M	15	£245M	20	£261M

The levels of growth achieved will depend upon the recovery rate of the world economy and the potential changes to the competitive position of Belfast and Northern Ireland. The targets are based on a detailed analysis. The spend targets include an increased spend per visit which is an important target for Northern Ireland tourism overall. This plan and subsequent actions are based on achieving the high end targets.

Targets still to be agreed with DETI/NITB as requested as part of the Belfast City Council's response to the Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy 2020. Targets to be reviewed once DETI strategy is finalised.

THE TOURISM SPATIAL DIMENSION

A city's spatial configuration and qualities are key factors in how it is experienced and enjoyed by visitors. City tourism experiences are more than a collection of attractions, events, entertainment and shopping. They are a product of the totality of the urban experience. This includes the quality and character of the physical landscape, the vibrancy of the cultural environment and the presentation of the City as an accessible and connected place. In this way, the City is more than the sum of its parts for both the visitor and citizen.

By looking at tourism in the City from a spatial perspective, its structure in terms of 'place' can be understood and built upon. The shaping of the physical environment, both built and natural, contributes to the celebration of the City's heritage. It also represents the City's sense of expression, values and confidence and says something about contemporary life-style and aspirations for the future.

In Belfast, the visitor experience can be enhanced and is directly affected by a number of key spatial principles:

- The quality, variety and vitality of public spaces such as streets and squares and the degree of shared 'public life' that is created;
- Access to and use of natural assets such as the River Lagan and the Belfast Hills;
- Access to and presentation of the city's built heritage in the form of buildings of architectural and historical significance and areas of visually and historically important townscape value – Belfast City Centre is a conservation area and this must be developed sensitively;
- The degree to which the city's local distinctiveness is conserved and nurtured, including visual landmarks and viewing points;
- The ease with which visitors are able to move around the city, either walking, cycling or by public transport;
- The emphasis and importance placed upon the quality and distinctiveness of new urban interventions both in terms of buildings and public spaces;
- The degree to which different parts of the city are successfully connected by safe, attractive and visually interesting public spaces and access corridors e.g. the River Lagan; and
- The degree to which environmental sustainability is nurtured by projects such as the North Foreshore, Connswater Greenway and the creation of 'green' connections between neighbourhoods across the City

Visitor surveys and other sources suggest that one of the principal shortcomings in Belfast's visitor experience is the level of quality and appeal of public spaces and streetscapes. This is combined with issues around street cleanliness, public transport provision and street animation and entertainment. It paints the picture of a city which lacks the kind of environment expected in great European cities. Improvements have been brought about in recent years by the 'Streets Ahead' programme, the urban riverside public realm improvements at Lanyon Place and along the Lagan. Unprecedented levels of investment have taken place in new developments such as Victoria Square and St Anne's Square and the emergence of locations such as the Queens and Cathedral Quarters as unique and attractive 'character areas'. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there is still much that Belfast has to do in order to build on recent investment to improve its physical environment and put it, at least, on a par with other great cities across Europe.
Such improvements of the physical environment must embrace the whole city and not just the central areas.

Tourism Areas ('Place Destinations')

In order to gain a better appreciation of the city tourism offer, Belfast is considered as a series of tourism clusters which are described here as Tourism Place Destinations. These represent areas within the city where there is, or there is planned to be, a concentration of tourist related activity e.g. attractions, services, restaurants, cultural venues, viewing points.

These areas include established parts of the city offer as well as those that are still emerging as tourist areas.

The Lagan River-Maritime Corridor – the waterfront has already seen significant change over the last decade. Future developments include the City Quay's Project, Carville's Development, linkages between Titanic Quarter and the City Centre via new bridges, development of the river itself and its towpath for leisure and recreation – linking Belfast to Lisburn and beyond. The waterfront requires animation, events, and interpretation.

City Centre – an attractive heritage/ conservation area with good quality retail. Investment in infrastructure such as Victoria Square has greatly added to the product offering as well as new hotel development.. The Waterfront, Ulster Hall and Grand Opera House remain excellent event venues. Investment into the evening economy and Sundays product is paying dividends, although Belfast cannot be complacent - there is now a need to look at the night time economy, café culture, food tourism, city centre based events, street animation. Plans for the Rapid Transport will help provide greater linkages to and from the City Centre. City Hall provides an excellent visitor attraction – probably a key weakness is that there are no other visitor attractions in the core area.

Queens Quarter – Featuring Queen's University, Botanic Gardens (1829). The Palm House (1839), The Tropical Ravine (1889), new Lyric Theatre to open in 2011, Ulster Museum, Crescent Arts Centre re opened, Queen's Film Theatre. Annual Belfast Festival at Queen's – due to celebrate its 50th Anniversary in 2012. Range of things to do including bars, clubs and restaurants. Lively student scene. Need to look at how all attractors can work together.

Gaeltacht Quarter – this area offers much to those who have an

Belfast Hills featuring West Belfast, Belfast Castle and Zoological Garden- Belfast Hills are a huge asset for the city and strategic over-view is required through a partnership of key stakeholders led by Belfast Hills Partnership, National Trust and Belfast City Council.

There is now major access to the Hills and Divis and Black Mountain providing for the first time easy access to the dramatic overviews of the whole City. This draws visitors through West or North Belfast and therefore provides a basis for future growth in those areas. Wildlife on the Hills remains an undiscovered tourism asset.

The Castle is a great asset in a number of ways. The grounds are beautiful and provide easy access to walks leading further up the hills. The situation provides one of the best view points across the City. The zoo is one of the most successful tourism attractions in Belfast. There is an opportunity to combine the zoo experience with the location and terrain. A study is currently being prepared to assess the future of the Floral Hall which could be a significant tourism attribute for Belfast. Cave Hill itself needs to be more accessible.

North Belfast Cultural Corridor is home to some of the City's most historic and interesting buildings. This destination focuses on the development of the Crumlin Road Gaol and Court House as tourism drivers for the area but also includes the opportunity of developing high quality public realm and environmental improvements along a corridor from Cathedral Quarter to Crumlin Road Gaol, linked by a series of stepping stones that provide access to a rich and diverse cultural experience at key sites including Clifton Orange Hall, Indian Community Centre and Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church through interpretative exhibitions. Community inspired public art will feature heavily interest in the local community, people and places that have shaped local history. 'Belfast dates back to an ancient fort which once controlled the ford across the River Lagan. The name of the City derives from the Gaelic Béal Feirste: The mouth of the Sandbank. Nowhere is this historical legacy more potent and vibrant than along the Falls Road where the Irish Language has flourished, igniting a range of 21st century cultural experiences. This area is the City's Gaeltacht Quarter. Lying between the City Centre and Andersonstown, the Gaeltacht Quarter includes the historic Fall's district. The Falls Road / Bóthar na bhFál surges its way through the Quarter; its side streets and green spaces, tributaries infusing this great cultural gateway with its character and vibrancy. Built on traditional strengths of Irish language and culture the Quarter is a must see Belfast tourist and arts experience. The Quarter represents a new vibrant set of voices in the city. A location for imagination, initiative and achievement.

The Shankill Road - The Shankill's history goes back two millennia, when an ancient track, rising out of marshland *(now downtown Belfast)* connected counties Down and Antrim. On this track, likely trodden by St. Patrick, the first Christian settlement in this part of County Antrim was founded in 455 AD. *(Shankill, or Sean Cill in Irish, means Old Church).* The ancient Shankill Graveyard in which the original church stood can still be visited today. The Shankill was also at the heart of Belfast's linen industry – "Irish Linen" and two of the original mills, though no longer operational, stand nearby on the Crumlin Road and at Conway Street. Memory of the recent conflict is never far away as witnessed by the memorials to those who died in the area; the dozens of paramilitary, political, cultural and community murals and the ever-present "peace walls" which still snake through the area, the longest of which in Cupar Way, is being transformed into an outdoor gallery of world class art works. Newly opened Tourist Information Point at Spectrum Centre in 2009.

Lisburn Road There are more than 200 independent businesses on the Road and a wide and varied choice of restaurants, coffee shops and wine bars. The road has over 50 clothing independent stores offering more than 600 individual labels dedicated to fashion for ladies, gents and children. The road has an active Business Association that have been lobbying for additional support from stakeholders to help the development and marketing of the road. The Independent sector has been under pressure

along the route creating iconic focal points at areas previously linked to conflict e.g. Westlink bridge. The overall project will be underpinned by an annual programme of high profile multi-cultural and shared events.

Cathedral Quarter - this area is already a prominent tourism destination for Belfast and the Cathedral Quarter Steering Group is in the process of completing a strategy for the future development and management of the area. It is the cultural focal point for Belfast housing the Belfast Circus School, The Black Box, numerous galleries, restaurants and cafes. Home to the Cathedral Quarter Festivals, Festival of Fools, Culture Night as well as St Anne's Cathedral. The area is currently undergoing significant investment with St Anne's Square development incorporating the new Ramada Encore Hotel as well as the new MAC, which when opened in 2012 will be a state of the art theatre, and contemporary art gallery. There is also ongoing investment from the University of Ulster. The area hosts the 5 star Merchant Hotel which reflects excellent reuse of an historic building

Titanic Quarter- We need to plan approaches across time to manage the period between now and 2012. The current situation certainly does not translate into a Place Destination, in terms of physical environment, access and visibility of the heritage story, clearly linked to the 'building site' situation. The issues of what the Titanic brand/product actually represents need to be resolved. Signage needs to be adaptable to the current fluid public realm. HMS Caroline and Nomadic are major opportunities however costly. The schooner Result could add another dimension to the array of ships coupled with related industrial heritage. The H & W HQ is an authentic asset which needs to be maintained to ensure the Titanic Place Destination realising its true potential. More could be made of the Harland and Wolf Cranes which are an iconic landmark for the city (similar cranes on the Clyde in Glasgow become viewing towers for the city. From a number of directions, the relationship with East Belfast needs to be addressed, as well as with the wider City.

The Connswater Greenway – is an opportunity to unveil key aspects of the Belfast Story e.g. Conn O'Neill and the mystery of his vanished castle. The Castlereagh Hills are another potential gateway and view point, a connection to the south and east, part of the important Lagan corridor. Need to explore links to CS

from increasing rent and rates, falling footfall and a fall in consumer spending. This has resulted in businesses closing down and the increase of vacant units. The increase of vacant units have fuelled low footfall and spend as well as impacting on the look and atmosphere of the road.	Lewis. At the other end, the Lower Newtownards Road and surrounding areas have potential, but are currently problematic and could impact on Titanic Quarter. There should be a focus on open spaces linked to the Greenway.

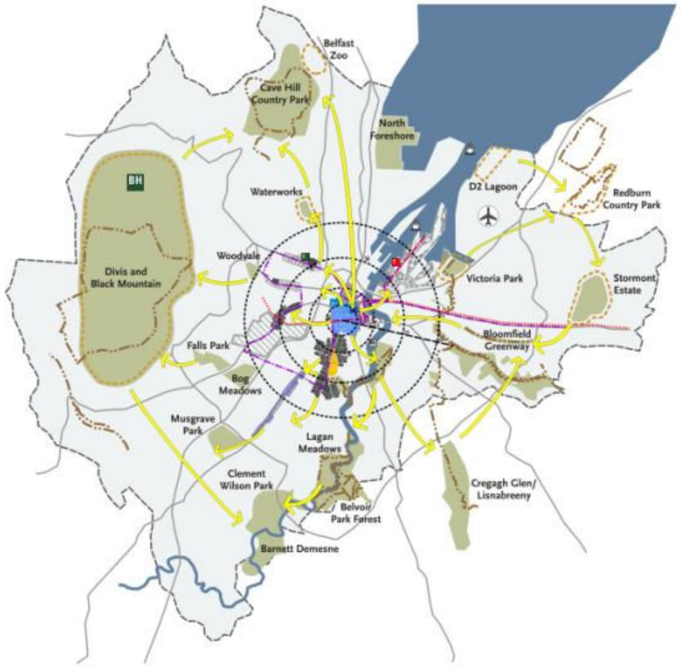
Consideration of Belfast's main existing and potential tourism areas in this way helps to identify gaps in service and product provision and highlight issues in relation to connectivity. Insight is also gained into how the whole city offer might be presented to the visitor by way of a series of inter-connected destinations.

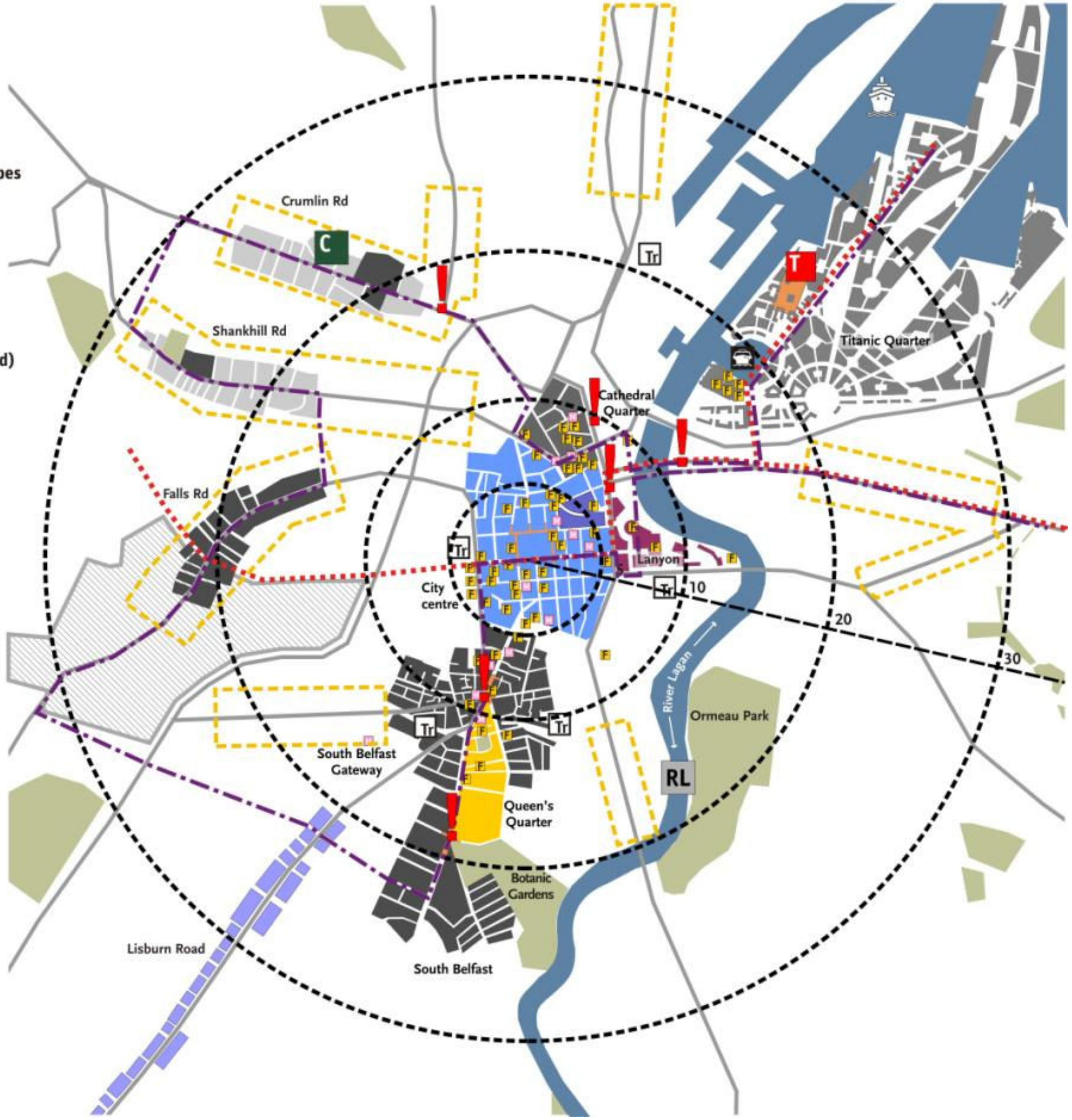
To do this, a series of actions will be required throughout the term of this framework document;

1. *Identify key partners and stakeholders*
2. *Audit each Tourism Place Destination with an agreed template*
3. *Agree distinctive role in overall Belfast offer including role in telling the Belfast Story and community tourism*
4. *Identify key actions with partners/stakeholders for implementation*
5. *Map connectivity / linkages between each destination e.g. public transport, bridges (e.g. bridge linking Titanic Quarter to City Centre / Cathedral Quarter), visitor experiences/ guided tours, common product development opportunities e.g. events, music tourism as well as public realm opportunities e.g. link between Crumlin Road Gaol and the Cathedral Quarter via North Belfast Cultural Corridor – high profile public realm development of Crumlin Road and Carlisle Circus.*

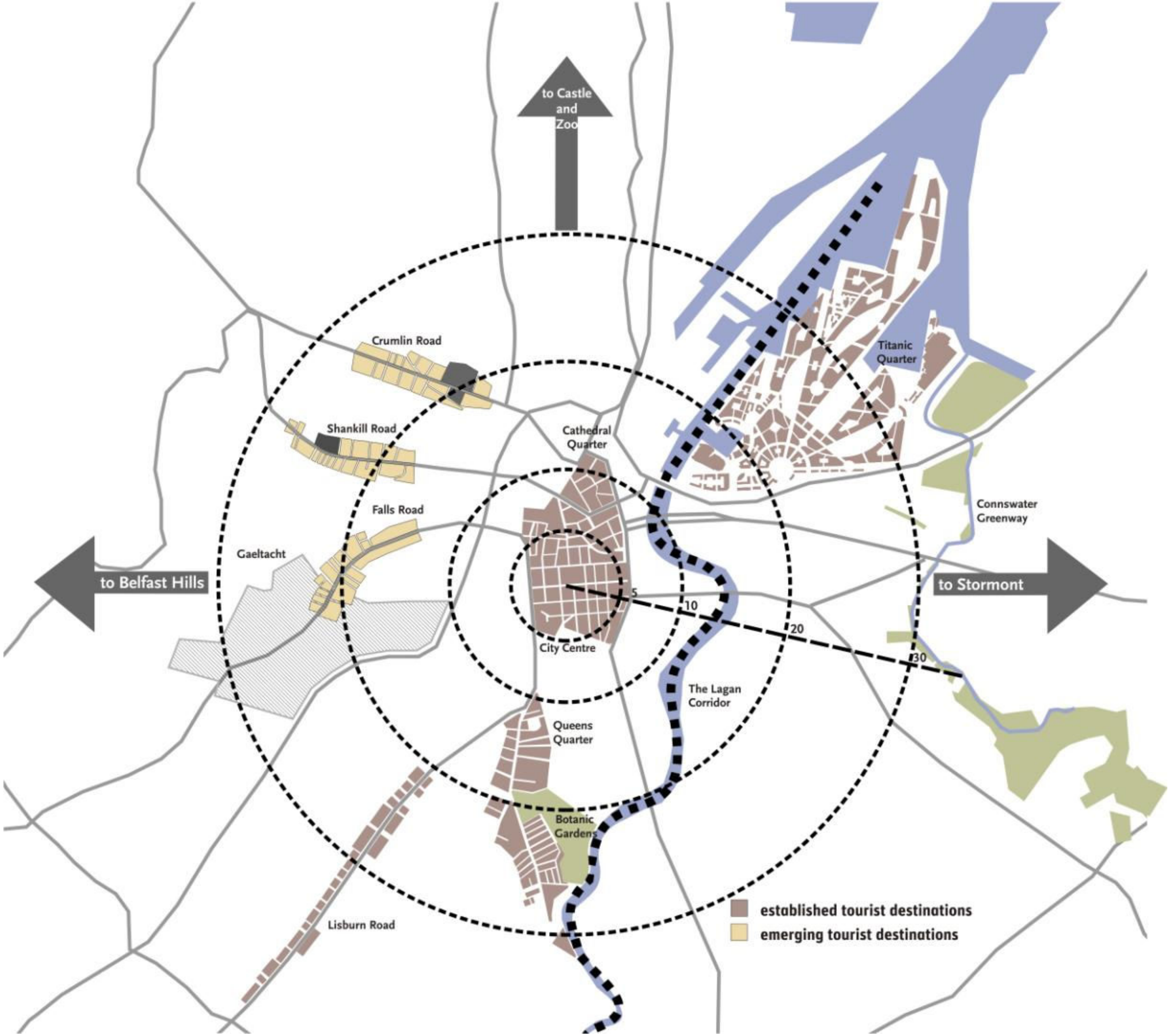
tourism spatial framework

- city centre
- walking distance
- F food venues
- M music venues
- T Titanic Signature Project
- C Crumlin Road Gaol
- BH Belfast Hills
- RL The River Lagan
- NG National Art Gallery (not located)
- CC Conference and Exhibition Centre (not located)
- places/focal points
- Tr railway stations
- marina
- airport
- ferry
- arterial routes
- route improvements
- parks and designed landscapes
- ! urban breakdowns
- wildlife sites
- Gaeltacht Quarter
- footpath links
- dynamic connections
- existing City Tour Routes
- Guided Bus Routes (proposed)





tourism place destination



belfast integrated strategic tourism framework
route through core tourist areas

belfast integrated strategic tourism framework
uniting the tourism areas

tourism areas

gap zones in urban fabric

new urban structure

public realm

pedestrian priority

green networks

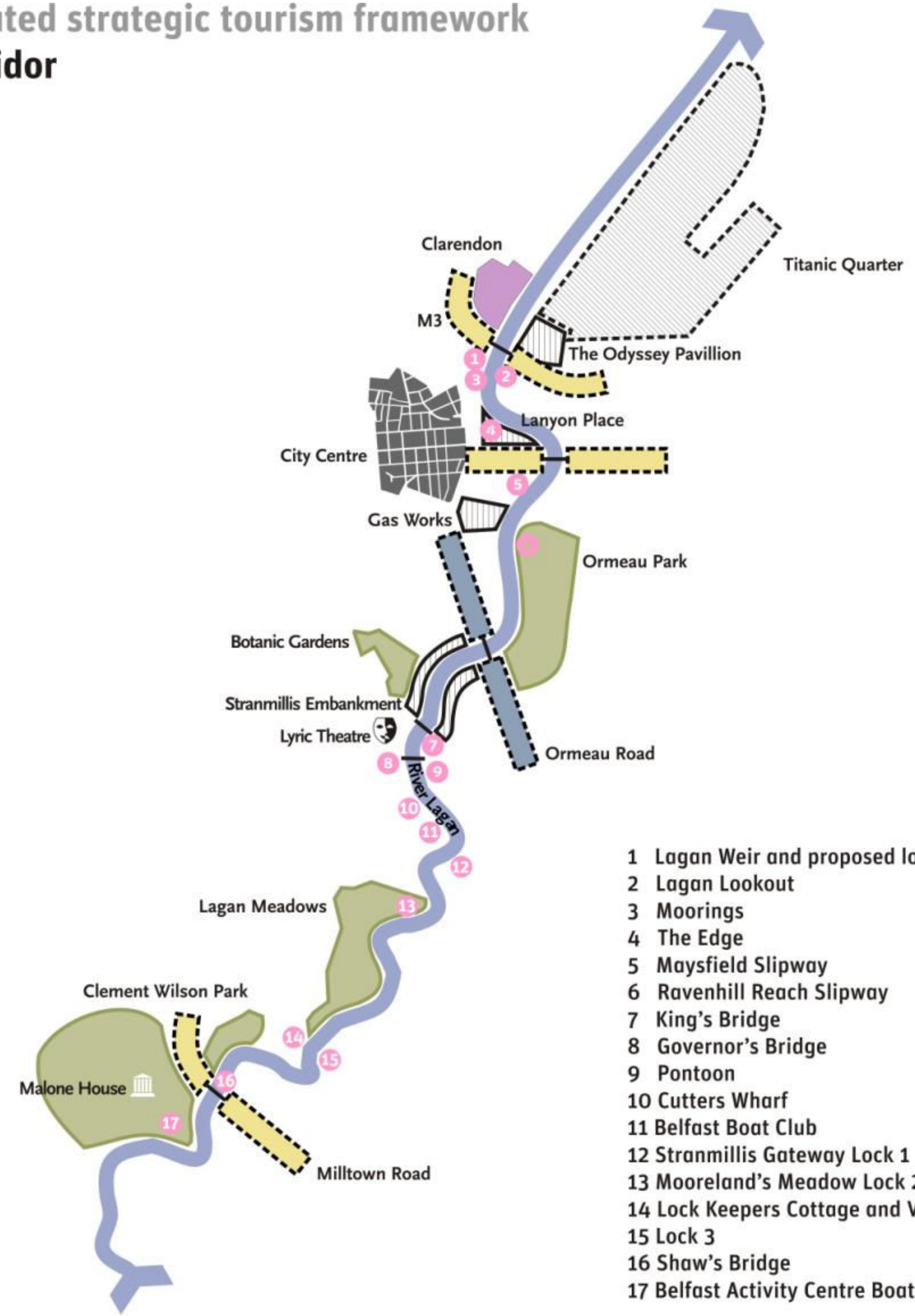
transport stop - placemaking in the urban fabric

trees and public realm define transport route

public transport routes structure the city centre

state of the art transport information systems belfast integrated strategic tourism framework

the lagan corridor



1 Lagan Weir and proposed lock
2 Lagan Lookout
3 Moorings
4 The Edge
5 Maysfield Slipway
6 Ravenhill Reach Slipway
7 King's Bridge
8 Governor's Bridge
9 Pontoon
10 Cutters Wharf
11 Belfast Boat Club
12 Stranmillis Gateway Lock 1
13 Mooreland's Meadow Lock 2
14 Lock Keepers Cottage and Visitor Centre
15 Lock 3
16 Shaw's Bridge
17 Belfast Activity Centre Boat House

In order to make more of and enhance the city's spatial qualities the following approach is recommended:

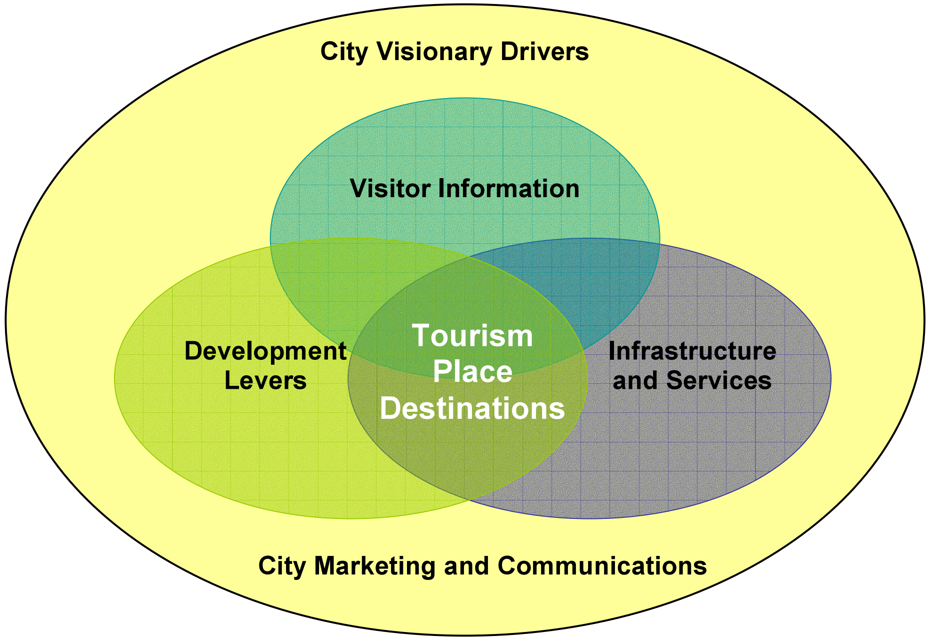
1. Establish Titanic Quarter as a world class waterfront visitor destination which aspires to the highest standards of urban design, sustainable transport, architecture and 'place-making' and which has excellent and well executed connections to the City Centre. Maximising authentic heritage such as the Harland and Wolf Drawing offices as well as iconic landmarks such as Samson and Goliath Cranes.	**2.** Work to establish the River Lagan as a principal 'thoroughfare' through the city, linking the Lagan Valley, the City Centre and the Harbour/Titanic Quarter while encouraging Lagan Canal restoration.
3. Develop the network of Tourism Areas (Place Destinations) across Belfast through informing future investment decisions, nurturing the uniqueness and offer in each area and presenting to the visitor the wide variety of 'places' to visit in the City.	**4.** Ensure Belfast City Centre is one the principal centres in the UK and Ireland with a range of quality facilities and services, and a safe, vibrant and animated public realm.
5. Enhance the city's public spaces, improving connectivity between attractions, facilities and city destinations (including the city's outer neighbourhoods) by investment in key locations. See Page 15.	**6.** Promote investment in a sustainable city-wide public transport system building upon the proposed Guided Bus Network and existing services, connecting attractions and facilities across the City which are becoming all the more widespread and potentially disparate.
7. Drive up urban quality across the City to achieve ever higher standards of design, and establish a 'Design Panel' to assess major strategic projects (e.g. the type of remit exercised by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment - CABE - in England) and a City Conservation Forum to promote the best care of Belfast's built and natural heritage assets.	**8.** Develop a City-wide 'Greenways' Strategy based on improving connections between City neighbourhoods and to and from the City Centre.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Following consideration of the market opportunities, the outcomes of the consultation process, the spatial dimension and comparisons with other cities, key product development actions for achieving the vision have been divided into three categories:

Visionary Drivers - These are the six main projects that will help to lead and drive tourism towards achieving the vision. They will greatly enhance the city's distinctiveness and uniqueness and inspire potential visitors to take the trip and enjoy the experience. In many instances these are regional drivers with an impact well beyond Belfast.
Development Levers - These are essential to developing tourism but are not simply capital development projects. They embrace a far wider range of subjects – they can provide the 'feel' of the city to the visitor and often the spirit.
Infrastructure, Services and Environment - These are the necessary components needed to make the city work effectively as a tourism destination and as a place to live and work. They will ensure that the basic services and facilities are provided to a standard and quality that fully complements the vision.

The following diagram demonstrates how Product Development relates to the **Tourism Place Destinations**. It is recognised that **not** all Tourism Place Destinations across the city will physically have a visionary driver, they will all have the opportunity to connect to the visionary drivers as they will benefit the entire city. Likewise, whilst they will require information and promotion at a local level, the destinations will be integrated into the wider city marketing and communications plan to promote Belfast as a City Destination. Tourism Place Destinations **must** offer a range of development levers and high quality infrastructure and services.



VISIONARY DRIVERS

One of the six is well advanced but the others need much work to be done to take them forward:

Visionary Drivers: Description	Contribution and Impact
Maritime Heritage & Titanic Signature Project This major new visitor attraction which will be the focus of associated developments in Titanic Quarter is regarded as the lynchpin of Belfast's tourism growth aiming to provide an integrated destination experience. It will have state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history. The Signature Project will be a catalyst to the whole theme of the maritime heritage of the city embracing icons such as SS Nomadic, Thompson Dock and H&W Drawing Offices. Due to the level of investment and ability to act as a significant attractor, Maritime Heritage and Titanic Quarter must be broader than Titanic Quarter and reference to other parts of the City, e.g. city cemetery where industrial fathers of the city are buried, possible joint publications and other events e.g. Titanic Quarter and Gaeltacht Quarter. Mention of people who worked and built the ship linking into areas across East Belfast etc. ***Outputs Required:*** ➢ *Deliver new visitor attraction by 2012* ➢ *Ensure Titanic Quarter is developed as a Tourism Place Destination offering a quality visitor experience incorporating H&W cranes, drawing offices, Thompson Dock, Abercorn Basin, SS Nomadic, Lagan Legacy.* ➢ *Prepare a wider maritime heritage strategy* ➢ *Explore opportunity of retaining HMS Caroline in Belfast and linking with Nomadic and Result.*	This iconic attraction will create new levels of uniqueness and appeal for Belfast and Northern Ireland. It will also encourage other investment and support other businesses and maritime attractions in the area. It is a £97m project which aims to attract some 400,000 visitors per annum, of which around 150,000 will be from outside Northern Ireland. It will support 600 jobs during its construction and 165 permanently in the centre and its associated facilities. It will generate £30m annually for the economy. It is essential that it is not an isolated 'attraction' divorced from its maritime and industrial context and physically isolated as a development from the rest of the city.
Crumlin Road Gaol Guided tours of the Gaol, available on a seasonal basis since 2007, have demonstrated its potential for further development as a significant new visitor attraction. However, it needs a sensitive and innovative approach to ensure iconic status. Parts of it also have the potential to tell 'The Belfast Story', perhaps concentrating on the social side in a way that complements other visitor attractions. There is an opportunity to connect communities in Shankill and West Belfast through the development of the Crumlin Road Gaol. ***Outputs Required:***	This also has the potential to become a unique experience and source of discovery for visitors to Belfast. It will act as a magnet to attract people out of the city centre and to help spread tourism into less traditional areas. It is physically linked to the old Courthouse which offers a significant tourism opportunity if the building can be restored. Together they could help transform that part of the Crumlin Road into a new tourism hub and a gateway to outer parts of the city. It will contribute to the Vision by adding to the range of things to see in the city. It has unique stories to tell and already has proven appeal.

➢ *A multi dimensional visitor experience incorporating the Gaol and Courthouse focusing on the Belfast Story* / local characters	
Belfast Hills **West Belfast and Belfast Zoo** Improved accessibility and the opening of the National Trust Centre on Divis Mountain mean that spectacular views of the city are now open to all. The priority now is to promote these as an attraction linked to the facilities and access now provided and to use their unique viewpoints as a means of bringing visitors through and into West and North Belfast. There is a real opportunity to develop the Western Spine (Falls Road/Gaeltacht Quarter) as gateway to hills.To achieve the area's full potential as a visitor attraction, however, innovative access options should be investigated. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Promote the Hills as a Belfast's viewpoint attraction.* ➢ *Examine feasibility of innovative access options including tours and guides* ➢ *Maximise tourism opportunity of Belfast Zoo*	Towers and viewpoints are frequent features of city tourism. Promoting and providing innovative access to the Belfast Hills will add to the unique range of experiences on offer. It will also help to spread the benefits of tourism by encouraging more visits to other parts of the city and increase length of stay. The newly accessible Divis and Black Mountain walking routes are relatively unknown still and have the potential to become 'must visit' city attractors. Scope for tours and guides for the Hills is of strong potential.
The River Lagan The river is the spine of Belfast and has a major role as a means of connecting key riverside sites. This includes providing linkages between Titanic Quarter and other key developments which might include a re-opened Belfast Marina, a Conference & Exhibition Centre and international hotel developments. There also needs to be greater activity on the Lagan and its riverbanks linking into the local communities who have lived on the banks of the River Lagan for years. This will be assisted by more tour boat activity but also by developing, through time, the link between Belfast Lough, Titanic Quarter and the Lagan Canal. This will require two major investment projects, at least, involving new locks at Lagan Weir and at, and beyond, the Stranmillis Gateway. The visionary investment in Titanic Quarter should initiate a chain reaction of development along the river. The provision of good river and riverbank connections is a priority. Cycling and walking along the river will have a widespread appeal. Links to Titanic Quarter, Queens Quarter and the City Centre will help develop a destination approach.	The river's role as a medium for connecting places of activity and interest is of great importance. It can attract new levels of use which, in turn, will encourage further development. The river is also the link that ties in with Titanic Quarter and the development of maritime heritage. It can link in turn into the old Lagan Canal through restored locks and in help open up the Lagan Valley to increased tourism use. This in turn may lead to further long distance canal linkages providing a major canal and river network. The attraction of Belfast to visiting craft will be enhanced by the provision of marina facilities. Significant capital investments will open up this largely unused resource in the centre of the city and create a reinvigorated feature of interest and activity for locals and visitors.

Actions Required: ➢ *Analyse existing and proposed land uses and spaces and produce a comprehensive plan that shows how the Waterfront can be developed, linked and promoted as a key area for visitors* ➢ *Pursue initiatives to increase activity on the river (e.g. more access points and moorings);* ➢ *Develop the Lagan Canal locks and linkages;* ➢ *Provide a marina on the sea side of the weir.*	
The Belfast Story This is a thread which should run through all that is done to develop tourism – to reflect the brand values of the city. It should embrace: Heritage – the story of the city through the ages – its people, its buildings, its conflicts Tradition & Community – the legacy of the city's recent history needs to be accessible to visitors To include the character and characters of Belfast and cross cutting our cultural offering. This is where we belong, edgy, different, cool etc. This also presents an opportunity to embrace our culture and identity. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Identify innovative ways to communicate the Belfast Story across the City and at key strategic locations*	To reflect the heritage, culture, urban design, tradition and community and peace and reconciliation in the city. Conflict resolution can be a focus. The tourism product should reflect this spirit of the city and ensure that it has a uniquely Belfast character. Losing this essence will mean that Belfast may simply be seen as 'another' regional city.
Conference and Exhibition Centre There is a need for new or extended integrated conference and exhibition facilities in the city, in response to growing competition and certain current deficiencies (e.g. lack of dedicated exhibition space). Significant work has already been undertaken to identify possible solutions to this product gap. With Dublin's new conference centre opening in 2010, there is now an urgent need to review options and potential delivery with a view to plugging Belfast's infrastructure weaknesses within the next 3-5 years if not before. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Examine opportunities for private sector solutions to space requirements;* ➢ *Alternatively, carry out long-term development and feasibility study;* ➢ *Back up with a Business Tourism Strategy at national and Belfast levels (if required).*	Belfast's conference business is currently worth £6m - £7m per year to the local economy. Since its opening in 1997, the Waterfront Hall has generated £10 for every £1 spent on its operating costs. New investment will help to improve competitive advantage and secure the benefits of conference business to Belfast tourism. This project will contribute to the Vision by consolidating Belfast's position as a business tourism destination.

DEVELOPMENT LEVERS

Development Levers: Description	Contribution and Impact
The Essence of Belfast This is a thread which should run through all that is done to develop tourism – to reflect the brand values of the city. It should embrace: Heritage – the story of the city through the ages The Cultural Offer – the unique culture and arts of the city made accessible to visitors Tradition & Community – the legacy of the city's recent history needs to be accessible to visitors ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Maintain a high standard and a variety of product that will encourage repeat visits* ➢ *Continue to develop access to culture and art programmes including Theatre* ➢ *Support for the concept of developing a Festival Feel around key traditional events;* ➢ *Ensure a welcome to all and marketable 'products'.*	To reflect the heritage, culture, urban design, tradition and community and peace and reconciliation in the city. The tourism product should reflect this spirit of the city and ensure that it has a uniquely Belfast character. Losing this essence will mean that Belfast may simply be seen as 'another' regional city.
Product Development Belfast City Council has made considerable investments in developing a range of 'new product' for visitors including: Hard Hat Tours, 72 Hours, CS Lewis Tours, Belfast Bred and Late Night Art Tours. Areas across the City have followed suit e.g. West Awakes tours. It is vital that this work continues to ensure that Belfast has a competitive edge and visitors can easily access new and exciting experiences across the city. These initiatives also allow interaction with local suppliers many of whom do not necessarily see themselves as tourism providers –who are supported through programming, networking clustering and packaging initiatives. ***New and emerging products that are a high – medium priority include:*** ➢ *Music Tourism;* ➢ *Literary Tourism;* ➢ *Family Tourism;* ➢ *Creative Tourism;* ➢ *Food Tourism;* ➢ *Roots Tourism* ➢ *Living History* *A key action will be to conduct appropriate market research to identify those products that will have the greatest return.*	It is essential that there is continuous investment in consumer research to identify new consumer trends as well as competitor offerings, to allow Belfast to make informed decisions on product development and investment.
City wide Presentation and Design Initiatives Great cities are planned, nurtured, cared for and altered with pride and passion. This translates into how visitors experience them. Cities are also a series of connected places that give them distinctiveness and character. Some of these places are animated, lively, fun and well-dressed. They encourage visitors to move around and enjoy different experiences. The presentation of Belfast to its citizens and visitors must address these issues. Current improvements to public	Belfast tourism needs an approach that recognises these vital aspects which will consolidate the feel or essence of the city, its history, culture and new vibrancy. This must reinforce a uniquely Belfast character – as

streets and spaces will help considerably but the programme must be extended beyond these commitments. Urban Design enhances the sense of place and gives a distinctive feel to Belfast. Belfast's award winning visitor signage schemes must be kept up to date and standards maintained. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Continue development of public/open spaces, greenways and public art to consistent standards* ➢ *Maintain & continuously improve signage across the city* ➢ *Underpin improvements with an awareness and civic pride campaign* ➢ *Establish a City Design Panel to advise on specific projects and oversee design competitions.* ➢ *Maintain a high standard of street furniture and dressing.* ➢ *Adopt a more effective response to litter, graffiti and general lack of cleanliness* ➢ *Enhance street entertainment through incentives and an annual festival or competition*	reflected in the city brand. This is an important part of the Vision.
Sports Tourism Many cities benefit from large sporting events. International standard sports facilities are essential for the city to attract top quality events such as athletics. Improved stadia, a new velodrome, basketball/volleyball centre and tennis centre are important requirements. Gaelic football at Casement Park, Rugby League at Windsor, Ice Hockey Games in the Odyssey are all opportunities to promote and package weekend breaks. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Upgrade of existing stadia by the three main sporting bodies* ➢ *Accept national stadium as a long-term project* ➢ *Decision by DCAL and BCC following a consultants report on location options* ➢ *Continue to work towards improving and packaging the range of key sports facilities in Belfast.*	Sports facilities will attract some international events but is likely to have a supportive rather than a major impact on achieving the Vision. Key sports facilities for cycling, tennis, basketball and volleyball will add to Belfast's attractiveness for international sport.
Events Belfast hosts spectacular events such as the World Cross Country Championships, the World Amateur Boxing Championships, The World Irish Dancing Championships, Tall Ships Race and the forthcoming World Fire & Police Games. A continual events programme is essential but a balance must be struck to ensure regularity of repeatable significant events against costly one-offs. For example the West Belfast Festival provides an annual, homegrown, yet international event for the city. There is a need to develop events linked to Belfast's distinctiveness e.g. Culture Night initiated in September 2009 was success worthy of repeating. The City Carnival offers potential to showcase Belfast's rich cultural offer. Events often provide a catalyst for innovative tourism developments and should be used as a platform to pilot tourism/visitor initiatives in the city e.g. city branded visitor welcome programmes. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Support for the objectives of the City Events Unit:* *(1) to deliver a programme of annual events, including one major high quality event each year; and (2) to increase the innovative nature of events by developing three by 2013 that are unique to Belfast and which can be seen as signature events for the city*	Potential economic benefit and image development must be key considerations in future planning for major events. As well as generating economic benefits, events also contribute to the Vision by increasing the reasons to visit to Belfast, especially for unique experiences.

➢ *Harmonise BCC events Strategy with NITB's new events approach.* ➢ *Maximise the Titanic and London Olympics 2012 opportunity with a high quality annual events programme throughout the city starting in 2011.*	
Green and Open Spaces City parks and open spaces where locals and visitors can relax are key features of urban tourism and Belfast offers plenty through the city parks, Bog Meadows and Belfast Hills. The North Foreshore Giant's Park presents an opportunity to expand green spaces. Current proposals for this reclaimed land include public art, walkways, cycleways, viewing towers, an education centre, eco-friendly pavilion, bird hides, play areas, festival space, pitches and recycling projects. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Carry out further analysis of how to realise the North Foreshore Giant's Park site's potential to provide an iconic attraction with international appeal and distinctiveness;* ➢ *Keep green spaces at the forefront of development planning;* ➢ *Maximise tourism use of city parks.*	Green and open spaces provide attractions in themselves to visitors and enhance the city experience. The North Foreshore Giant's Park as currently proposed would be a major asset for the citizens of Belfast. Its wildlife appeal should be highlighted. To reach iconic status and to achieve higher impact as a key element of what attracts visitors to the city needs more careful consideration and definition.
Tourism in the Community Belfast is unique in having a tourism product in its outer areas that is linked to the city's recent history. This is the focus of tourism related to recent conflict and conflict resolution, although there are opportunities to showcase community art, community events and sport to visitors. Work to extend the appeal and to engage with visitors at a local level is important. Support, therefore, is given to new tourism services and activities in these outer areas (e.g. peace wall art; local information centres; tourism entrepreneurship; and working with tour guides). Much of this will be captured through the Tourism Place Destinations. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Implementation of the Outer Areas Strategy within the context of Tourism Place Destinations and beyond.* ➢ *Encourage innovative opportunities for visitors to interact at a local level*	Visits to the outer areas where community tourism is focused add to the tapestry of things to experience and help to spread the benefits of tourism when visitors actually stop there. Meeting the locals and a distinctive Belfast flavour are the essence of the outer areas and, as such, they contribute significantly to the Vision.
Business Tourism In addition to the key Visionary Driver – a new or extended integrated Conference & Exhibition Centre – Belfast must continue to work smart in order to compete with other city destinations. To ensure business tourism remains at consistent levels on the short to medium term as new facilities are developed we offer value for money, distinctive experiences and have the ability to respond promptly to opportunities in the market place. ***Action Required:*** ➢ *Increase the City's subvention fund to attract conferences as a priority;* ➢ *Maximise the return from all conferences to the city;* ➢ *Further develop the concept of the city conference planner;* ➢ *Examine new opportunities for incentive venues;* ➢ *Develop high quality experiences suitable for delegates and partners;* ➢ *Develop a strategy to turn business delegates into leisure visitors.*	Belfast needs to ensure that the city works for the business visitor. Belfast needs to be a connected city offering a range of distinct venues, high quality accommodation and dining experiences. All of these taken together provide a healthy rewarding environment for business tourism. City wide itineraries to be developed to promote al parts of the City to delegates.

INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENT

Infrastructure, Services and Environment: Description	Contribution and Impact
Destination and Gateway - Air and Sea Services Improved access to the city is essential if it is to attract more visits from international markets and if Belfast is to realise its Gateway potential. Air and sea access from GB is comprehensive but mainland Europe air routes have had a difficult time. It may be necessary to incentivise access to key European markets. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Ensure key European markets have direct air access.* ➢ *Examine opportunities for new air route development via marketing support initiative driven by central government.* ➢ *Encourage investment by sea carriers.* ➢ *Promote better rail-bus connectivity and more on-line rail booking.*	Access services have a critical role. Achieving the Vision depends on attracting more visitors. Continued and successful access improvements will strengthen the Gateway role of Belfast even further.
Internal Transport and Movement There has been recent progress in encouraging visitors to use public transport to and within the city. The growth in sightseeing tours, including Bus Tours and West Belfast Taxis Tours has also had a major impact. BCC has promoted a range of walking trails and cycling can also contribute to connectivity. However, further improvement in connecting various parts of the city, including the Tourism Place Destinations is essential – connectivity is the key. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Ensure that the new Rapid Transport System and other initiatives provide efficient links between visitor attractions and facilities and service outer areas of the city for tourism benefit;* ➢ *Promote and implement connectivity improvements in accordance with the Spatial Plan;* ➢ *Provide better connections between Tourism Place Destinations and key attractions;* ➢ *Investigate use of river as a traffic artery.*	Belfast is a relatively small city with much of its tourism assets within walking distance of each other. However, ease of movement and attractive routes are essential if visitors are to get the most out of what it offers, as expected by the Vision. Opportunities for movement along the river using it to connect places of interest would have great tourism appeal.
Visitor Facilities and Services The need for new and improved attractions has already been addressed. The city must offer a full range of services for visitors, including a higher profile and efficient Welcome Centre with a comprehensive range of facilities and services. The private sector must deliver services such as tours, guides, and hire in a professional way. DCAL's proposal for a National Art Gallery also presents an infrastructural opportunity, which Belfast should bid for it if opportunity presents itself ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Ensure provision of a world class Welcome Centre that reflects the Gateway role of the city;* ➢ *Encourage private sector tourism services of a high standard including pubs and restaurants;* ➢ *Explore opportunities of developing a Quality Stamp linked to Belfast Brand;*	Ensuring a high quality, range and standard of services and facilities is essential to making sure that visitors have a comfortable and memorable experience in Belfast.

➢ *Ensure signage is maintained and upgraded where necessary.* ➢ *Bid for DCAL's National Art Gallery if opportunity arises*	
Tourist Accommodation Future accommodation priorities for the City are to spread the supply wider across the whole urban area and to meet the changing demands for apart-hotels, boutique hotels and guesthouses. Belfast has experienced substantial growth in hotel rooms in the past five years and currently there is a pause with the economic downturn. Further growth will depend on improved economic conditions. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Encouraging developments that respond to known gaps and locational deficiencies (e.g. outside the city centre).* ➢ *Monitoring the demand for new rooms on an ongoing basis.*	The needs analysis carried out for accommodation in the city indicates a requirement of 850 new rooms if the target of 20% increase in nights is achieved by 2013. Lower growth of 15% or 10% means requirements of 471 or 129 additional rooms. Source markets will help determine the accommodation type. For example, European visitors to Ireland have a preference for Guest House/B&B accommodation. The current market pause means forecasts of need are on hold.
Evening and Sunday Economy Extended retail hours, a café culture and a fun environment give a feel to a city that encourages visitors and adds to their enjoyment. Restaurants, pubs and all food outlets should be memorable visitor experiences day and night and all weekend. The café culture must be developed in a safe environment and with the cultural sector providing reasons for visitors and locals alike to share and enjoy a thriving pulsating city. Night time economy needs further emphasis and development to ensure a safe well regulated environment. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Support the Evening Economy initiative and explore Night Time Economy initiatives* ➢ *Encourage more Sunday opening.* ➢ *Develop the café culture with cultural sector support including lobbying for legislative changes* ➢ *Support existing markets and identify gaps in provision*	A thriving evening and Sunday economy is essential to a successful tourism destination and should ripple out from the City Centre to other parts of the city.
Retailing Belfast has had a golden period of retail development. However, even more development is essential for the city centre, including Royal Exchange, which will transform a run-down part of the centre, and other projects that will encourage speciality and independent traders. Independent traders can help provide a retail offer unique to Belfast and help to differentiate it from other destinations. The Tourism Place Destinations in the city can be enhanced through the retail offer differentiating them from other places. ***Actions Required:*** ➢ *Support the Royal Exchange proposals;* ➢ *Help to identify other opportunities for development across the city, especially for tourism-related retailing (e.g. speciality traders, more authentic experiences).*	Nearly half of all visitors to the city do some shopping in the centre. It is, therefore, an important asset for tourism. It is also a major motivator of day trips, particularly for cross-border visitors. Independent retailers add to a City's authenticity.

MARKETING

The ambitions of the strategic framework can only be met if a successful marketing strategy and plan are implemented. Such a plan will evolve and change over time to respond to prevailing circumstances relating to access, exchange rates, products, accommodation supply and market demands.

The Marketing Context *– this is the environment in which the marketing of the city – and its tourism development – will take place in the next five years and on. It is a context which at the moment provides major challenges in continuing the growth path of recent years as the economies of the world struggle and tourism numbers fall everywhere. Contextual factors also include a marketing revolution driven by continuously evolving information technology and web based platforms. Traditional marketing of tourism is fast been replaced by new techniques and channels forcing destinations to quickly adapt to change. Also of significance is the growing dominance of low cost carriers that provide a range of air services on a point to point basis, opening and closing routes with alacrity. This too shapes the marketing approaches taken and the ability to react swiftly to new opportunities.*

The longer term **marketing objectives** of this strategic framework are:

- ✓ To communicate the vision and the brand strengths to the key markets;
- ✓ To position Belfast as a 'must visit' city in Ireland - to experience its unique appeal, character and heritage;
- ✓ To place Belfast as a leading business tourism destination with top quality facilities for conferences and exhibitions;
- ✓ To ensure that Belfast is associated with top class events and entertainment and as a lively and fun year-round destination;
- ✓ To portray Belfast as a convenient and welcoming Gateway to the island of Ireland and a practical tourism base;
- ✓ To promote the Port of Belfast as an alternative 'marquee' port for cruise tourism to Ireland.

These objectives need to be disseminated and shared through the marketing and communications strategies and plans of all the partners, with the Belfast brand integrated into the message. New and improved tourism products and visitor experiences coming on stream will provide valuable opportunities to communicate a steady flow of inspiring reasons to visit, thereby ensuring a continuing air of excitement and promise.

Tourism marketing also contributes to the wider projection of the city's image which in turn enhances investment prospects and the greater economy. Events marketing, in particular, can add great value through image enhancement.

The competitive advantages and marketing challenges for Belfast currently include:

Competitive Advantages	Marketing Challenges
➢ A city in transformation - continuing novelty/curiosity factor ➢ Major transformational projects ➢ Currency value ➢ Authentic feel of a major international city ➢ Calendar of events ➢ Titanic Quarter & heritage ➢ Vibrant city reputation ➢ BVCB – mature public/private partnership ➢ Belfast Brand ➢ Tourism potential of all of the city beyond the City Centre ➢ Good and improving access ➢ Port facilities & maritime links for cruise tourism	➢ Range of European cities vying for market share ➢ Achieving stand out in a crowded marketplace ➢ Choosing & prioritising best opportunities across markets & segments ➢ Scale of tourism industry in short term ➢ Achieving partnership buy-in to maximise effectiveness of marketing budgets ➢ Maintenance of price advantage ➢ Changing air access ➢ Range of agencies with responsibility for marketing Belfast ➢ Concerns over safety & security

Setting Priorities

This pyramid illustrates the comparative value of different types of visitor to an urban destination. Business visitors have highest spend per day and per visit. They are followed in sequence down through different types down to day- visitors. A destination will therefore improve spend patterns by focusing on those segments which can contribute the most to the city's economy. Leisure tourism for Belfast is best if all of vacation nights are spent locally followed by the benefit from acting as a Gateway. All island leisure tourism will take third place although length of stay can determine exact benefit.

Where possible - marketing and sales strategies should be aligned with the pyramid. This will depend on the product on offer and the ability to target the most appropriate market segments effectively and efficiently.

This will be influenced by access and accommodation and the changing market trends such as the increase in short city breaks.

For Belfast, the marketing approach is also set in the context of Tourism Ireland's international marketing focus and NITB's approach to marketing within the island of Ireland.

Urban Spend Pyramid

The initial marketing strategy should focus on best prospect markets. The key aims are:

- Increase the number, length of stay and spend of visitors attracted to the city for short leisure breaks and destination-specific visits, including festivals and events.
- Expand the number of conferences and meetings, commensurate with facilities and capacity.
- Penetrate the ROI & GB markets to attract more visitors and more bednights.
- Maintain and grow the level of Northern Ireland stay-over visitors while continuing to grow the number of day visits, including cruise visits.
- Expand the short break market from key European metropolitan areas with direct air access.
- Expand the city's share of overseas touring visitors to Northern Ireland/island of Ireland, including achieving greater success in attracting gateway visitor traffic via Belfast ports of entry from Britain, mainland Europe, North America and further afield.

Different market elements need different approaches.

Business Tourism

Business tourism is a special focus for market development, targeted at the MICE (Meetings, Incentive, Conference and Exhibitions) segments and Associations. While improved conference and exhibition facilities are a priority objective, they may not be realised in the short term. In the meantime, business tourism offers a particular opportunity based on the attractive strengths provided by the range of hotels, particularly those with conference facilities. Key marketing needs to improve Belfast's competitiveness include:

- A conference development fund to help to compete for conferences;
- Development of Belfast Business Ambassador Programme;
- Maximising opportunities from secured conferences i.e. number of delegates, length of stay, partner programmes and repeat leisure trips
- A focus on quality standards and services;
- 'Luxury Belfast' programme aimed at the incentive market.

Destination Leisure Tourism

This market has grown substantially in the past five years. It is city tourism based and dominated by short breaks. Most value stems from the visitor using the city as a base to explore. It may however form part of an all island visit where a gateway in ROI has been used.

Key marketing needs to increase competitiveness are:

- Wide range of keenly priced accommodation;
- Wide range of attractive tourism product on offer;
- Easy access from all key markets;
- Effective communication to the market through all media channels;
- Stability.

Gateway Leisure
This is in effect a subset of destination leisure tourism but has better value to the economy as gateway visitors are more likely to stay longer and have a higher spend than those who enter through the ROI air and seaports. The essential element of gateway traffic is good air and sea connections. Competitiveness can be increased through:

- Frequent and competitive sea routes to GB;
- A comprehensive range of air services to major GB cities;
- Frequent air services to main European target markets – city pairs;
- Scheduled air services to USA and Canada.
- Co-operative and consistent marketing between Belfast/Carriers/Tourism Ireland

All Island Touring
There is still excellent growth potential in claiming an increased share of the all island touring market for leisure visitors. Northern Ireland and Belfast have still an opportunity for increasing the volume and value of this business.
Key marketing needs to improve Belfast's competitiveness include:

- Good communication of the product on offer and its quality and accessibility;
- Continuing liaison with tour operators, media commentators and through social and other new media;
- Clear communication of the brand and its desirability;
- Communication of the value message;
- Communication of the ease of visiting and of a welcome for all;
- Agree approach and budget with Tourism Ireland/NITB.

VFR – Visiting Friends & Relatives
This market had been the backbone of much of Belfast's tourism business for many years and still provides valuable stable business. It is a market that cannot be targeted except through improving knowledge of new tourism attractions, easy access – particularly low fares access and easily accessible information.
Key marketing needs to improve Belfast's competitiveness include:

- Good communication of the product on offer and its quality and accessibility;
- Communication of the brand appeal to both locals and their overseas extended families and friends;
- Wide range of good value air and sea fares;

- Wide range of access routes from traditional VFR markets – GB, USA, Canada and some other long haul;
- Communication of Belfast being a fun 'happening' place;
- Maximise PR opportunities around events and in particular 2012 as well as other key anniversaries.

Cruise Tourism

Belfast has made dramatic progress in cruise tourism in the past decade. The cruise tourism focus in the next three years – when the industry is consolidating in cold water cruising around the British Isles – is to:

- Maintain service standards and keep costs to cruise lines and passengers low;
- Maintain industry contacts;
- Continue promotion at current levels;
- Maximise spend opportunities from secured cruise market to Belfast;
- Investment in cruise infrastructure .

The completion of the Titanic Signature Project will provide a major reason to visit for cruise ships in 2012. New product is essential for cruise ship continuity each year and this links closely into the ambition of the strategic framework.

Day Trips

Like VFR the day trip market – almost entirely from Northern Ireland and ROI – is promoted through focused communications. The day visitor will be motivated to either shop, attend and event or visit an attraction. The ROI market focuses largely on shopping at the moment because of the currency benefit in doing so. All have a potential for conversion into overnight saying visitors depending on the length of journey undertaken.

The market requirements relating to day tripping focus on:

- Communication of the value message to the ROI market;
- Communication of ongoing opportunities and range of shopping available;
- Communication of events and of attractions;
- Clear value for money themes and practical pointers re parking, rail/bus services etc.

The initial marketing strategy should focus on best prospect markets. The key aims are:

- Increase the number, length of stay and spend of visitors attracted to the city for short leisure breaks and destination-specific visits, including festivals and events.
- Expand the number of conferences and meetings, commensurate with facilities and capacity.
- Penetrate the ROI & GB markets to attract more visitors and more bednights.
- Maintain and grow the level of Northern Ireland stay-over visitors while continuing to grow the number of day visits, including

cruise visits.
- Expand the short break market from key European metropolitan areas with direct air access.
- Expand the city's share of overseas touring visitors to Northern Ireland/island of Ireland, including achieving greater success in attracting gateway visitor traffic via Belfast ports of entry from Britain, mainland Europe, North America and further afield.

The market segments that can bring best return for Belfast are examined below:

Market	Best Prospect Segments	Volume/Value	Characteristics	Priority
Northern Ireland	Day Trips City Breaks – Events	2008 Day Trip market valued at £130m overshadows other domestic markets.	Those furtherest from Belfast will stay overnight particularly after events; Meetings business essential; Day trips - shopping and event led.	High - for bread and butter market
RoI	Day Trips; City Breaks; Affinity Groups Corporate Meetings VFR;	Core Market Potential 0.4m interested in visiting Northern Ireland. In 2008 worth some £70m	A growing and easily accessible market attracted by shopping and currency value. Corporate Meetings driven by industry.	High - to take advantage of currency strength;
GB	City breaks; Gateway holidays Affinity Groups; MICE[1] VFR	24m holiday trips to non sun destinations. 3 out of 4 interested in visiting Ireland. GB market in 2008 worth £150m.	Business links give a solid market base. Extensive air and sea connections provide high potential. Reasons to visit still needed – value message from BVCB. Northern Ireland needs to be on rotation for UK associations	High – BVCB can get across a value message – better value than ROI for GB market. Need to work closely with Tourism Ireland.
Europe	Gateway Tourists; Island of Ireland tour itineraries; City Breaks	Germany – Outbound market of 10m holiday trips by air; almost 3 out of 4 interested in Ireland; France - Outbound market 17m holiday trips by air; over 2 out of 3 interested in Ireland. Worth some £14m in 2008.	Markets to Ireland increasingly short break driven therefore connections critical. These have reduced. France & Germany have greatest Ireland potential. Belfast Welcome Centre reports strong Italian and Spanish market – additional research required on European Markets for Belfast	Medium – access becoming restricted through key markets Increasing reliance on ROI gateways
Long-haul	Island of Ireland Tour Itineraries Gateway Tourists; VFR Affinity Groups.	North America worth £28m to Belfast in 2008 (10% of total value of incoming tourism) and Rest of World some £7m.	Gateway connections from USA and Canada – those where tourists arrive in Belfast to begin a Northern or All Ireland holiday	High – linked to Gateways & all island tours. Titanic Signature Project will be a key driver

[1] MICE – Meetings, Incentive, Conference and Exhibition

Communication

Themed Communications

Successful communications for a tourism destination often involve a *Big Idea* that grabs the imagination of the potential visitor and often encourages repeat visits. These Big Ideas are presented as *themes* that run for a period of time – usually a year – and which provide a consistent message that gives clear inspiration and motivation to the potential visitor and a call to action.

For Belfast this is an important communication message and one which has some urgency. This is because 2012 looms – Titanic year - when the centenary of the loss of this iconic vessel is noted through the opening of the Titanic Signature Project. To engage thoroughly on an international basis with the travel industry preliminary information for that year and its key events will be needed in 2010. Such an approach ensured maximum international exposure and the ability to provide a range of events and 'happenings' that can bring in new visitors over a sustained period of time. NITB is currently leading on a Titanic Marketing and Communications Plan which will require support from a range of stakeholders.

Ideally Belfast can develop an ongoing series of themes years or seasons so that there is continuous presence in the media and continuously refreshed reasons to visit.

2013 is the 400th Anniversary of the City's Charter and this too presents a major opportunity to create a themed year with a series of specials events. There is a need to engage widely across the city on what themes are significant and which can bear the 'weight' of a yearlong series of events. BCC must lead the work in preparing the ground through quality analysis and then bring together key partners who will buy in to the themed message.

The adoption of a themed approach helps ensure ongoing success from Public Relations as a constant supply of news stories is available to the media across the world.

New Approaches to Communication
As traditional marketing methods for tourism decrease in importance, there is an opportunity to communicate Belfast's Brand, and the improved products and services evolving from this strategy, in a highly cost-effective way through e-tourism. Current channels of communication such as direct consumer marketing, media publicity, consumer promotions and fairs and traditional brochures, whilst still important, will become of much less significance than on-line material.

The future balance of traditional publications versus on-line downloadable material must be kept under review. Traditional print will not disappear completely but can be scaled down significantly while TICs, for example, can print off material or have it available through self-help sites. However, some print material is essential as it can, through skilful design and quality print, have a greater impact in convincing a potential visitor to take a trip. Each piece of Belfast print must be critically reviewed to find the balance.

BVCB's on-line presence must reflect the Belfast Brand and its strengths while linking closely with the Northern Ireland and Ireland brands. The range of products, services and experiences on offer must be shown to have the uniqueness, distinctiveness, variety and quality that will motivate people to make the visit.

The industry providers must, in turn, have comprehensive on-line material and product offers through both their own sites and key on-line agencies such as Expedia or Travelocity or Orbitz. Securing coverage of Belfast by travel partners and intermediaries will form an important strand of the city's marketing strategy. Plans must ensure that it is readily available to consumers in all target markets.

Belfast must also develop its own database of customers so that a valuable stock of contacts is available that may be used for e-marketing purposes. This Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is essential in developing communication and e-marketing.

But this is not enough – there is much more to do in new media. Belfast is under-served on the social web and with now a customer-to-customer (c2c) marketplace; there is an opportunity for public, private and social economy sectors to encourage interaction and exchange of information online.

Belfast is a young dynamic city but this is not mirrored in its online profile on Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. There is an absence of RSS feeds, social bookmarks, blogs and podcasts linked to destination sites. All of these add to the dynamism of the city and its attraction as a vibrant destination. All can focus on proving that Belfast is '*bursting with energy and enthusiasm*' and offers '*distinct, varied and quality experiences*'.

It is the linkages into and through on-line and new media which are increasingly critical for Belfast and Northern Ireland and much future focus will be placed on getting a high profile and effective presence – not just from promotional bodies but from every tourism business, from past visitors and from commentators, journalists and bloggers.

VISITOR SERVICING AND MANAGEMENT

In 2008, 7.1 million visitor trips were made to Belfast. Visitor servicing and management is a key priority for the city to ensure it fulfils the Belfast brand promise of being a warm, vibrant and welcoming city.

Visitor servicing and management successes to date include;

- Belfast Welcome Centre: opened in 1999, Belfast's flagship TIC welcomes over 310,000 visitors and generates an income of £907,315 per annum;
- Gateway Tourist Information Centres at the George Best Belfast City Airport and Belfast International Airport;
- Award winning visitor signage scheme across the city centre.

Whilst Belfast has invested considerably in these areas and this is reflected in the high customer satisfaction of information provision and signage across the city, the direct relationship the city develops with the visitor will create a competitive edge.

Objectives

The future visitor servicing and management objectives for Belfast are:

1. To increase visitor spend in Belfast;
2. To provide visitors with a seamless Belfast experience;
3. To ensure front line services offer consistent high quality customer care;
4. To be at the forefront of technology in meeting visitor requirements.

Visitor Information Services

The Belfast Welcome Centre, currently located on first floor premises in the city centre, provides a focal point for visitors to Belfast, offering ticketing, retail, accommodation bookings as well as general information on Belfast and Northern Ireland. The two tourist information desks at the George Best Belfast City Airport and the Belfast International Airport offer visitors a welcome on arrival. Across the city, there are also visitor information points at Queen's University of Belfast, Spectrum Centre, Shankill and An Culturlann in West Belfast as well as a range of visitor attractions, restaurants and hotels that have the potential to provide information to the visitor. Advances in technology offer new ways of presenting information to visitors with the ability to download relevant localised information at the click of a button. Belfast needs to offer a balance of physical information provision which reinforces the welcome of the city with electronic information provision, ensuring visitors can access relevant information in the format they want through the medium they want.

Key priorities:

- Belfast Welcome Centre should be relocated to central, ground floor location to maximise footfall. Services at all tourist information centres/points should be reviewed in line with visitor requirements;
- A network of visitor servicing points to be developed across the city linking to Tourism Place Destinations;
- A renewed focus on auditing, collating and presentation of relevant and up to date information on Belfast's tourism product;
- Establish an ICT working group of representatives from NITB, BVCB, BCC and other relevant industry members with aims.

Visitor Management Services

Belfast must ensure that visitors have a seamless experience in the city. Using public transport, booking concerts, taking a tour or dining out should be effortless. Belfast must be prepared for peak periods when cruise ships are berthed and international conferences are in the city.

Key priorities include

- Develop an online 3 – 5 year city planner for the industry tracking conferences, events and key developments;
- Launch a Belfast Pass for attraction entrance, restaurant deals and special discounted tours;
- Work with the Industry to develop more Belfast specific packages;
- Develop personal tourism greeter opportunities during peak periods;
- Develop a Belfast Brand customer care initiative aimed at those who have a direct contact with the visitor including regular networking / ambassador type initiatives to improve two way communication on what visitors are looking for and what they think of the city.

Visitor Orientation

Belfast's current pedestrian signage provision is excellent in relation to interpretation and orientation. Traffic is directed via white on brown tourism signage and again, there have been considerable improvements in this area over the last number of years, including white on brown motorway signage for Belfast Zoo. As new products develop, signage must be constantly updated.

Key priorities include

- Preparation of new round of applications to NITB and Roads Service for brown signs (to reflect new attractions/ facilities and change in circumstances) and to identify requirements for more interpretative signing across tourism place destinations;
- Further consideration with Roads Service of the case for brown signing the BWC (which attracts over 300,000 visitors) and other key attractions on and from the motorways and key access routes into Belfast.

QUALITY STRATEGY

Providing quality experiences is at the heart of the vision for Belfast tourism. Quality assurance and standards are key elements of delivering such experiences and hence the strategy recognises the opportunity for BCC's Tourism Unit to act as a one-stop-shop to direct city businesses to appropriate training and quality solutions. This also aligns with NITB's quality strategy.

The following programmes are at the core of quality assurance and standards delivery and are keys to success:

Who?	**What?**
Future Skills Action Group (FSAG) for Hospitality and Tourism	FSAG Action Plan 2009 -Themes of skills provision, sector attractiveness & co-ordination, communication
Workforce Development Forums set up by DEL + 6 Regional Colleges	Identify skill needs of local economy and strategic response needed from training providers
People 1st Sector Qualifications Strategy Blueprint for Action 2008-09	Ten priority areas
Belfast City Council	Harte Project
DEL – People 1st	Junior Chefs Academy

Improving quality requires a wide range of stakeholders to sign up to an agreed agenda for action. An immediate requirement is to establish a Hospitality and Tourism Forum for Belfast with a specific remit on quality and skills. It will need meaningful private sector representation and participation. Tourism is a people-based industry and aspiring to deliver consistent high class experiences is dependent on positioning it as a valued career option.

NITB and Belfast City Council are committed to achieving World Class Standards. The challenge is how to best implement a tourism quality mandate. Quality is linked to consumer trust. The potential first-time visitor is well informed, increasingly using social networking media to make holiday choices. The Belfast Brand still has the potential to influence destination choice but the delivery promise - the quality of the visitor experience - is under scrutiny.

Northern Ireland has a certification scheme for tourist accommodation which is legally based and is currently being updated. This process ensures that all tourist accommodation meets minimum standards. NITB is now in the process of also introducing a new voluntary quality development and grading scheme for all types of tourism accommodation from hotels to B&Bs. The AA is a partner in the project and it mirrors best practice in GB.

With Belfast the leading accommodation resource in Northern Ireland, co-operation in the successful introduction and coverage of this new scheme is essential in ensuring world class standards. Communications and training initiatives with providers in Belfast will be essential.

NITB also is committed to introducing voluntary quality development and ratings schemes across the tourism product including visitor attractions. This too will help ensure that the Belfast product meets standards that underpin the vision. The scheme will be rolled out over a period of time.

The successful implementation of these schemes in Belfast is a top priority.

Any future skills development initiatives in Belfast need to be: enterprise led; available locally; incorporating flexible learning; fit for purpose and aligned to the Belfast brand and NITB's quality standards. The need is to focus on a 'can do' mindset that will continue to attract new and repeat visitors to Belfast. There are a number of agencies with an interest in the development of tourism in the City but an initial requirement is to streamline access to information on tourism training, skills, quality and standards. The BCC Tourism Unit is well positioned to take up this role.

MONITORING AND RESEARCH

Successful implementation of a major strategy requires constant effective monitoring to ensure that both momentum and direction are being maintained. Doing so requires focused research and reliable data to ensure that an accurate reflection of what is happening on the ground is available to those charged with strategic oversight.

The Belfast Tourism Monitor (BTM) provides the basis of most tourism data for the city covering both staying visitors and day visitors. This provides data measurement that equals that of comparative cities in the UK and Europe. The model used to prepare the data is both complex and multi-faceted. NITB also produces tourism data for Belfast, excluding day visitor estimates.

There are some discrepancies between the two sets of data, with BTM consistently recording greater levels of visitation and expenditure than NITB. It is recommended that Belfast City Council and NITB work together to harmonise the data. In addition, several detailed recommendations are proposed on methodology which would enhance the quality of the data, including encouraging the accommodation sector to provide consistent occupancy data.

The presentation of BTM data can also be made more effective for monitoring purposes through the following:

- ✓ Provide time series data showing trends over a five year period;
- ✓ Provide all year on year changes – for total visits, visitor nights and expenditure;
- ✓ Provide a full breakdown of visitors by Purpose of Visit – Day Visitor, Holiday, Business, VFR, Other;
- ✓ Provide a full breakdown of origin of visitors preferably showing Purpose of Visit.

This data enhancement will make monitoring easier and more effective.

In addition to enhanced statistical data, other areas in need of focus relate to visitor satisfaction, impact of marketing and monitoring of development. The cost effectiveness of undertaking this independently for Belfast is an issue. NITB undertakes Visitor Attitude Surveys every two years which examine visitor satisfaction and the most cost effective approach may be to co-ordinate and share with Belfast City Council. Similarly monitoring of effectiveness of marketing expenditure by BVCB should be a built-in process to every campaign. Development monitoring is the easiest to undertake through a process of twice-yearly examination of progress in the attractions, accommodation, services and related sectors.

Together these actions will provide a thorough base of research so that progress may be accurately monitored.

MANAGEMENT & CO-ORDINATION

Tourism growth in the way envisaged in this strategic framework will not be achieved without a concerted effort to make it happen. This requires two strands of action – implementation and engagement. Both should be tackled simultaneously and given a high priority by those who can facilitate change and prioritise investment.

Following the Review of Public Administration, Belfast City Council will have an enhanced range of functions, giving it a greater direct influence in shaping city development for tourism. This is a welcome change.

Three recommendations are presented here relating to high level co-ordination and overseeing, the tourism delivery body and day-to-day focus.

High Level Co-ordination – it is recommended that a Tourism Co-ordinating Group, chaired by the Lord Mayor, be established to oversee the implementation of the Strategy. It should meet no more than twice per year and should be focused at Chair, CE and senior civil servant level. The Group will receive progress reports on every aspect of the Strategy and take action where necessary to refocus and free up blockages. It will issue progress reports and provide media comment to ensure that tourism in Belfast maintains a high profile and to keep pressure on delivery against targets. The Group could be formed from BCC, NITB, BVCB, DETI, DRD, DSD, DCAL, DEL, Translink, NMNI, Sport NI, BHC and airports – with opportunities to have other sectors and interests represented. It will be important to ensure the Local Tourism Place Destinations feed into this structure.

Tourism Delivery Body – as part of the review process, four options were examined for a tourism delivery body for Belfast. These were delivery by:

a) the national tourist board;
b) the city council;
c) a trans-industry marketing organisation;
d) a partnership.

The four models were examined in detail and the firm conclusion was that a partnership organisation focused on tourism provides the most effective structure for Belfast especially for marketing and visitor servicing. This reflects many European models and is considered best practice. It is recommended that Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau maintains its current role and that Belfast City Council continues to lead on tourism development.

Day- to-Day Focus – while the high level committee can realistically meet twice per year, this alone will not keep pressure on delivery of the strategy. It is recommended, therefore, that a *Strategy Implementation Team* of officials is established which will be charged with servicing the Tourism Co-ordinating Group and keeping track of all aspects of the strategy; giving early warning of issues arising; providing linkages at officer level within the framework of agencies and departments; and creating a network of committed individuals well-versed in the strategy and its vision.

It is recommended that Belfast City Council chairs this Officer's Team which will have in its core membership BVCB, NITB and DETI. Ideally, all contributing Government Departments and agencies should be members but a more practical approach may involve attendance on a project or need basis. The Group should meet at least five times per year and report to the Tourism Co-ordinating Group. The skill will be in adding value rather than being seen to be simply a reporting group – through a problem solving and action orientated approach.

At a micro level, within Belfast City Council, there are many departments and units which have a role to play in delivering this strategic framework – Parks and Amenities including Belfast Zoo, Events, Waterfront Hall, Ulster Hall, Environmental Health, Building control, Creative Industries and Economic Development, Planning and Transport, Policy and Projects and so on. With the RPA there is a renewed focus on efficiency and working smarter. A key role for BCC's Tourism Unit will be to combine the resources across the council to work towards fulfilling the vision set out within this document.

LEADERSHIP

The delivery of an effective strategy requires the engagement and involvement of the private sector throughout the city and region if the brand promises are to be realised. Tourism is currently receiving a high profile and, therefore, there is a danger in simply providing more industry meetings or newsletters exhorting greater efforts. It is recommended that BVCB builds on its private sector membership to address specific issues that are essential in providing a top class visitor experience. Meeting wear-out is an issue with the private sector and consideration should be given to virtual forums/ industry intranet These should include:

- Tourism Quality Forum – giving feedback on quality issues and recommending strategies to overcome them – this may cover staffing, training, infrastructure;
- Customer Contact Forum – as detailed under Visitor Servicing;
- ICT Forum – as detailed under Visitor Servicing.

The inspiration to the industry must come from the top and therefore the Lord Mayor's bi-annual reports, following the Tourism Co-ordination Group meetings will act as a rationale for media appearances and debate. As Belfast's private sector forms the bulk of the Northern Ireland tourism industry, careful orchestration with NITB is necessary to ensure that there is a flow of information and challenges that are regular but non repetitive.

Appendix 2

External responses to Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014

Respondent	Issues
Belfast Arts and Event CIC	Focused solely on Folk Town
Belfast Hills Partnership	Some rewording re: Hills and open spaces
Belfast International Airport	Simply wants Air Access Strategy for Northern Ireland
Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside	Would like reference to Wild Life in context of North Foreshore Green Spaces are not simply event spaces – high level group representation
Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure	National Gallery not a priority at this time Study should consider Libraries more
EPIC	Conflict Transformation, Politics and Peace airbrushed out.
Eventus QUB	Attitude to visitors needs must be improved Need to focus on quality
Hannahstown Community Centre	-
Historic Buildings Council	Concern over emphasis on Titanic Quarter – iconic building not enough Industrial Heritage understated Need Industrial Museum at HMS Caroline
HEARTH	TQ has nothing authentic – needs general maritime museum. Re-use of building in city No short term glitzy tourism

Historic Monuments Council	Liked Tourism Place Destinations – innovative Wider maritime heritage theme better than solely Titanic Needs historic built environment focus
HMS Caroline Belfast Committee	Wider Maritime overlooked in preference to TQ HMS Caroline, SS Nomadic, Result to form core of maritime museum No specific HMS Caroline Points
Lagan Canal Restoration Trust	Canal as a visionary driver
MAC Project	Cultural programming can not be dictated by tourists Anti National Art Gallery MAC will provide a range of facilities
NI Environment Agency	Use archaeology as resource Support essence of Belfast Plea for consultation
Lyric Theatre	More reference to Theatre Integration between Place Destinations Map needs to include Lyric as part of Queen's Quarter
Stephen Magorrian, Botanic Inns	Concerns re: Belfast being promoted as a gateway – it is much more. Easter is more of an issue than Sundays Need to emphasise Evening Economy Speed is of the essence

West Belfast Responses	
Falls Community Council	History of conflict and politics uniquely sought after by tourists. Local organisations and communities must be partners to develop unique & authentic tourism experiences Include St Comgalls Project Gaeltacht Quarter merely window dressing TQ and Lagan Corridor 'arbitrarily privileged' Visionary Drivers omit West Belfast
Féile an Phobail	Belfast is not a capital city Should not compete with Dublin. The National Art Gallery is in Dublin - not a tourism but DCAL project. GA, Murals, Political Tourism, Communities – all omitted. Brand and brand values wrong. Omission of Gaeltacht Quarter and Culturlánn. Murals. Marginalisation and deprivation not mentioned

	Tourism Spatial Dimension is 'regressive, reprehensible, offensive and
Gaeltacht Quarter Board	wrongheaded'. Draft deeply flawed – compound divisions –marginalise Inner West and Inner East communities. Damage good relations- counter to shared future policy. 7 pages of detailed criticisms
Pobal	Use of Irish Language – not just Gaeltacht Quarter – also linking quarters together
St Mary's University College	Community views must be taken into account. Use insights from USA into ICE – Intellectual, Educational & Cultural capital. Three points specifically: Belfast NOT a capital city; Community festivals need much more emphasis Irish language must be promoted
West Belfast Tourism Forum	Repeats many Féile an Phobail points Quotes many 'complaints' at Meeting 30th March.

Agenda Item 4

Belfast City Council

Report to:	Special Development Committee
Subject:	LED Plan – 2010/2011 Plan and Preparation for Integrated Economic Strategy 2011/2015
Date:	Wednesday 25 August 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development Ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives Ext 3427

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the most recent LED Plan "Sustaining Competitive Advantage" ran from 2006-2010. It focused on a range of business start-up and growth, employability and economic regeneration initiatives which were match-funded by EU Structural Funds. A review of the Plan has concluded that there were significant achievements from the work undertaken and has suggested some recommendations for future activity.

Based on these recommendations, and following consultation with partner organisations and relevant businesses, a revised plan has been drafted. It is proposed that this plan will last for one year and that one of the key development areas in the course of that year will be to work towards an integrated economic strategy for the city. This approach was endorsed by Members at the Development Committee meeting on 16 October 2009.

Key Issues

Review of Sustaining Competitive Advantage Plan: 2006-2010

In reviewing the effectiveness of the current plan, the following outputs were recorded:

- 4300 companies participating in our business programmes and events
- 449 direct jobs created
- Long-term unemployed acquired 600 accredited qualifications
- Average 10% improvement in turnover for companies participating in business growth initiatives
- Every £1 invested has levered £5 additional resources
- 80 business development programmes delivered
- 120 workshops, seminars and events undertaken.

This work equates to a total GVA of approximately £450million in the economy annually.

Development of current LED plan: 2010/2011

Since late 2009, discussions have been undertaken with a range of partner organisations and key business contacts on the future approach to Council-led LED activity and priorities for the new plan.

The proposal to work on a one year plan is based on feedback from partners that there is a need for greater synergy, particularly in the business start-up and growth arena. Similarly, the efficiency agenda is driving further collaboration and encouraging new approaches to project development and resourcing.

The targets for this year, to be reported through the Council's performance management system CorVu, include:

- Delivery of 44 business development programmes and events
- 850 businesses participating in business development programmes and events
- 135 new jobs to be created as a direct result of activities delivered.

The key messages within the plan are:

- The need for focused, measured intervention around business start-up and growth
- The need to develop key sectors that will sustain Belfast's economic future
- The need to ensure greater dialogue between universities, colleges and the private sector
- The need for the council to harness its own resources better to support the growth of the city's economy
- The need to develop inclusive regeneration support initiatives
- The need to agree a "Belfast proposition" – where and how the city needs to grow
- The value of a collaborative approach to economic development in a city and possible ways in which this can be achieved.

These messages are entirely in line with the views expressed by recent guests to the City, including Paul O'Connor and Declan Kelly. Both reinforced the need to grow the private sector for the benefit of the entire city and suggested that there was a need for greater collaboration between organisations responsible for the city's development.

The individual activities identified within this plan have been approved under the auspices of the wider Development Department plan which was endorsed by the 9 June 2010 meeting of this Committee. However this plan provides a focused framework for the economic development aspect of the department's work and allows the Committee to receive reports on the specific impact of the initiatives undertaken as part of this Plan.

Initial discussions have already been underway with Invest NI as part of the transfer of functions discussion and they have acknowledged that, despite the lack of progress on this front, they are keen to engage with councils to debate how collaborative support programmes for business start-up and growth might be developed. In parallel, there have been meetings with DEL as well and the international trade side of Invest NI with a view to identifying potential Belfast-based initiatives which will address our current growth challenges and help the city achieve its economic potential.

There has also been increasing engagement in area-based regeneration efforts, focusing initially on Titanic Quarter, where efforts being made to build a template as to how to support sustainable, successful regeneration initiatives that are integrated into and accessible to local communities while maximising the economic impact of the development across the city.

Crucially, it is considered that there is much that can be done to maximise the economic impact of the Council as a whole. For example, with an overall procurement budget estimated to be in excess of £80million annually, there is an opportunity to encourage more local and small companies to avail of the opportunities emerging.

This plan is also intended to capitalise on the growing ambition of Council as a civic leader, taking seriously its role in shaping the regional economic future, in conjunction with its partners. In this regard, we have identified the importance of developing close working relationships with the private sector as a step towards the possible introduction of community planning.

Structure of the 2010/2011 plan
A series of five strategic drivers for action have been identified within the draft plan. These are:

- **Improving business performance:** focusing on supporting more business starts and enhancing the productivity of existing businesses.
- **Supporting priority sectors:** there are a number of key sectors that represent future growth opportunities in Belfast and we are recommending specific investment initiatives to support for companies in these sectors.
- **Raising skills and reducing worklessness:** focusing on addressing the disparities across the city in terms of skills and access to employment, taking account of specific target groups eg young people.
- **Maximising connectivity:** maximising the development potential of the city for all citizens and ensuring equality of access.
- **Stimulating investment:** collaboration with partner agencies to maximise the profile of the City as a smart investment location.

Under each of these drivers, we have identified priority areas of focus with specific actions and targets for each. Details of each of these are included in the plan in Appendix 1.

It is clear that the economy is facing significant challenges at the present time and that these initiatives alone will not address all of these. However, our research and consultations have shown that there is a distinct role for the council to play in the delivery of targeted initiatives. Equally, in collaborating with other partners, it can address some of the wider challenges facing the city's economy in the short and longer-term.

Development of an Integrated Economic Strategy for the city
Previous work carried out by OECD and Michael Parkinson has identified the need for a common vision and strategy in order to maximise the economic competitiveness of the city. Now, more than ever before, there is a need to channel resources towards sustainable economic regeneration activity that will make Belfast a strong player in new growth industries and will provide a framework to allow local people to access employment opportunities.

Given the reduction in public finances, government departments and agencies are being forced to re-visit previous commitments and to re-negotiate budgets on a range of revenue and capital schemes. However this presents an opportunity to pool resources in order to maximise the impact of investment. In doing so, it creates a common agenda towards which all partners are working.

Despite the current challenges, the economic growth of the city must remain at the forefront of our agenda, as it does at regional level through the Programme for

Government. By developing an integrated economic strategy, the council and its partners will send a strong signal that there is an agreed commitment to a series of measurable actions that will move the city forward both socially and economically. This will dovetail with the regional economic strategy which is currently being developed by the DETI and which is scheduled to be completed by the end of this calendar year.

In order to progress the work on the Integrated Economic Strategy, it is proposed that resources already approved from the Development Department's budget be allocated towards analysis and engagement work. The outcome of this work will be to develop a medium-term economic strategy for Belfast that will:

- Create a vision for the economy alongside key priorities that will deliver on this vision, identifying key partners for engagement
- Identify key sectors in which the city can compete and become world-class, focusing on investment required to make this happen
- Consider the role of the education system in creating a dynamic, flexible, highly-skilled workforce
- Consider social mobility issues and look at how the most deprived neighbourhoods can engage with and benefit from the city's development
- Consider how development can happen in a sustainable manner and how commercial opportunities arising from the current environmental challenges can be exploited.

The work will involve a programme of structured engagement to gain buy-in and to ensure that the process is cohesive and holistic.

At present, budgetary approval is in place to carry out two separate pieces of work. These approvals are:

- £20,000 to carry out research on new business sectors to ensure that activities are relevant
- £25,000 to carry out research on post-recession economic growth models to support the new integrated economic strategy.

In order to ensure consistency and focus, it is proposed that Members agree to pooling these two budgetary amounts to allow one commission to be undertaken. If this recommendation is approved, Members are asked to delegate authority to the Director of Development, in association with the Chairman of Development Committee, to approve the most economically advantageous tender, subject to a form of contract being drawn up by Legal Services. This will expedite the process and ensure that the Plan is in place for the new financial year in April 2011.

Resource Implications

Budgetary approvals for the individual activities within the current (2010/2011) LED Plan have been endorsed by the Development Committee of June 2010.

The development work on the new integrated strategy will require a budget of up to a maximum of £45,000. This budget has already been approved by the Development Committee in June 2010.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the current one year LED Plan that will be operational from April 2010 to March 2011
- Note the proposed approach for the development of the Integrated Economic Development Strategy from April 2011 and approve the pooling of research

resources of up to a maximum of £45,000 towards the research, analysis and forecasting work required - Subject to endorsement of the above recommendation, approve the proposal to appoint the most economically advantageous tender for the work following a competitive tendering process and subject to an appropriate legal contract.

Decision Tracking
If recommendation is accepted, updates will presented to future meetings of this Committee. Time frame: November 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations	
LED	Local Economic Development
GVA	Gross Value Added
DEL	Department of Employment & Learning
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Documents Attached
Appendix 1: LED plan 2010-2011

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Background

Since 1992, Belfast City Council, like all local authorities in Northern Ireland, has been involved in promoting the development of its area, using powers granted under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act[1].

Through successive local economic development (LED) strategies and plans, it has delivered significant, tangible results that have contributed to the economic well-being of the city.

The most recent LED plan – Sustaining Competitive Advantage – was operational from 2006-2010. Key outputs from activities undertaken within this plan include:

- **4300 companies participating in our business programmes and events**
- **449 direct jobs created**
- **80 business development programmes delivered**
- **120 workshops, seminars and events undertaken**
- **Every £1 invested has levered £5 from other public and private sources**
- **Average 10% improvement in turnover for companies participating in business growth initiatives**.

Clearly, the economic climate is considerably different to when the previous strategy was developed. In light of this, the council has worked with its partners to develop a new interim LED plan for the city pending the proposed implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) in 2011.

As part of this process, we held a range of meetings with large and small businesses, other business support agencies and people from all sections of the council. We also carried out evaluations of our previous initiatives and asked participating companies for comments on their experience and what they had gained from taking part. The key points emerging from those consultations included:

- The Council has a clear role – at a strategic and operational level – to promote the development of the city

[1] http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20023149.htm#8

- The business support arena is a crowded one. There is a need to differentiate the service and promote the product to ensure that businesses are aware of and avail of what is on offer
- There is confusion among businesses as to who does what and, because of this, there needs to better signposting between agencies
- Providers should collaborate to ensure that services are built around business needs. In order to ensure that that happens, there should be mature dialogue between business support agencies and the private sector
- Resource efficiencies will be demanded from all public agencies. The imperative to work together will become even greater in the coming years
- While companies are aware of some of the initiatives in which council is engaged, they do not always know about the whole range of activities on offer
- Consideration needs to be given to how we communicate with businesses to ensure that they are aware of and can avail of all opportunities on offer
- Economic development cannot happen in isolation from physical or social development. Efforts must be made to ensure that the growth in the city is equitable and that all citizens are able to avail of the opportunities that arise from this growth
- There is a need to promote the message that proactive environmental management initiatives are good for business. By taking account of the impact that they are having on the environment, companies can enhance their bottom line.

It is proposed that the action plan and the activities within it will have a one year duration. It is our intention that, in the course of this year, we will work towards an integrated economic strategy for the city that sets the agenda for growth and agrees a series of actions required by all partners to get there. This will allow us to focus on those things that can make Belfast different, enabling us to present ourselves with the best in class and provide all our citizens with the opportunities to avail of the success that will come from that investment.

The strategic context

It is estimated that there more than 10,000 businesses located within the Belfast City Council area. The majority of those businesses are SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises). The EU definition of a medium sized business is a company that employs 250 people or less and that has a turnover of €50million or less. A small business is defined as one that has 50 employees or less and a turnover not exceeding €10million while a micro business is categorised as one that has 10 employees or less and a turnover not in excess of €2million[2].

According to the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR), the government database of all companies in the United Kingdom which are VAT registered and/or operating a PAYE scheme, the Belfast City Council area accounts for around 1 in 8 of these businesses in the region (over 8,700 businesses). Belfast also has the largest number of businesses with less than 10 employees (6,875) as well as being the District Council with the largest number of businesses with 250+ employees (80)[3].

Local economic development can be defined as "a set of activities aimed at improving the economic well-being of an area."[4] Traditionally, support initiatives for micro businesses have been the focus of the work undertaken by Belfast City Council as part of its local economic development agenda. We also focus on would-be entrepreneurs, providing them with the necessary support to make the move into self-employment. In addition, we invest in a range of skills and employability initiatives focused on key sectors or target groups with a view to enhancing the overall competitiveness of the city and collaborate with partners in efforts to promote the city as an investment location.

In doing this, we work alongside our colleagues particularly in Invest NI, Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the Local Enterprise Agency (LEA) network, the universities and colleges, relevant sector skills bodies and other agencies responsible for promoting the economic development of Belfast.

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[2] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index_en.htm
[3] http://www.detini.gov.uk/facts_and_figures_edition_12_dec_2009_link.pdf
[4] Beer, A. & Haughton, G. and Maude, A. (eds) 2003, *Developing locally: an international comparison of local and regional economic development*.

Recognising the importance of wider collaboration, we also develop initiatives with adjacent council areas – particularly those as part of the COMET (Councils of the Metropolitan Area) region – and engage in best practice exchanges and joint working with partners across Europe, principally facilitated through the Eurocities network and Sister Cities linkages.

We also input into policy making and programme design on a range wider issues affecting economic development in the city of Belfast. We do this through the engagement of our elected members, given their civic responsibility for the development of the city. We also liaise with private sector developers, those responsible for infrastructure development and community-based organisations across the city, as a means of ensuring that the city's development can be open to all citizens.

We work closely with our elected members and report on a regular basis to the Council's Development Committee who drive and endorse our work programme. We also provide secretariat support (through the Northern Ireland LED Forum) to the Economic Development Working Group of NILGA (Northern Ireland Local Government Association). This provides us with a platform through which we can inform and influence policy, gaining access to political channels and key contacts with responsibility for economic policy development.

However, as is the case all across all sectors, this operational context in which is we are engaged is changing. Although indications are that RPA (Review of Public Administration) may not progress in 2011 as was originally anticipated, there appears to be a commitment to continuing discussions with regard to a possible transfer of economic development functions. Equally, the recent Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP) carried out by a panel chaired by Professor Richard Barnett presented a range of recommendations for DETI and Invest NI which will have implications for local government. A review of the local enterprise agency (LEA) network may impact on the provision of pre-start and start-up support for businesses. And within local government itself, there is significant pressure on spending, with obligations to consider efficiencies now being embedded across all departments. Local economic development remains a discretionary function for local government in Northern Ireland (although it has now been made a mandatory function for most councils in England). Conscious of this climate, we must be flexible and find the niches where we can add value to continue our relevance in the local economic development arena.

A changing operational environment

Since the development of the previous Belfast City Council local economic development strategy – Sustaining Competitive Advantage (2006-2010) – there has been a significant change in the global economic climate.

Although the recession which officially began in the UK in the second quarter of 2008 technically ended at the end of last year with a 0.4% GDP increase recorded, growth slowed again in the first quarter of 2010 and economists predict a prolonged and largely jobless recovery.

The recession has translated into job losses, increased redundancies, a reduction in construction output, a growth in insolvencies and a drop in house prices and Belfast has not been exempt from any of these developments.

With regard to employment, data suggests that, as demand has picked up, businesses have responded by increasing the productivity of their current workforce, rather than taking on any new staff. This has sparked discussion of a "jobless recovery". The most recent labour market data for Northern Ireland mirrors the fragile recovery in UK output. Despite modest growth in the last quarter of 2009 (largely attributed to seasonal work), employment in Northern Ireland is 2.9% down on last year – the highest annual percentage fall across all UK regions (along with the Eastern and West Midland regions).

In Belfast, this has produced a claimant count unemployment rate of 7.2% - or just over 11,300 individuals (May 2010). While anecdotal evidence from the Belfast Business survey[5] suggests that 29% of companies are likely to increase their workforce in the coming year (as opposed to the 6% likely to reduce their staffing levels), the reality is that significant employment increases are unlikely to come for some time.

This subdued labour market continues to disproportionately affect young workers. Over the first quarter of 2010, one in three of those becoming unemployed (3,610 people) was aged 18 to 24. The long-term unemployed (LTU) are also being disproportionately disadvantaged with 2,330 or 21% of the unemployed register being made up of those who have been out of employment for

[5] Belfast City Council, *Annual Attitudinal Survey of Enterprises in Belfast*, January 2010

more than a year. Young workers also account for the most significant growth rates in the number of LTU. It is estimated that the resident employment rate is 62.7%. This is more than 10% below the Northern Ireland activity level[6].

Almost 1500 redundancies in the Belfast City Council area were notified to DETI in 2009 – a five fold increase on the previous year. An additional 662 were recorded in the adjacent council areas of Castlereagh, Lisburn and Newtownabbey. 185 redundancies have been reported in the year to date within the council area while there have been an additional 212 redundancies across the neighbouring council areas[7].

From January-March 2010, 102 companies and 554 individuals across Northern Ireland became insolvent – an increase of 79% and 25% respectively on the figures for the first quarter of 2009. In 2009, a total of 247 companies and 1959 individuals in Northern Ireland were declared insolvent[8]. Although figures for the Belfast area are not available at this stage, if taken on a pro rata basis, this is likely to involve around 30 businesses and 300 individuals.

The commercial property market in the city is extremely fragile at present. As occupier demands remain weak, rental figures have faced significant pressure in the last year. While competitive operating costs have traditionally been one of the major selling points for Belfast as an investment location, it is clear that developers consider that their margins are being cut to unsustainable levels. The hotel sector in the city is also considered to be at saturation point. With three new hotels at varying stages of development (the £16million Merchant extension is to open in June 2010 while the 120-bed Premier Inn at Titanic Quarter will open in November 2010 and planning approval has just been secured for a new hotel at George Best Belfast City Airport), property experts do not anticipate any new completions in 2010.

The public sector has had to respond to these crisis conditions by identifying efficiencies within its own operating systems in order to address the massive deficits. This has led to a significant re-focusing of effort in order to protect service delivery while seeking to provide value for money and maximise return on investment. These efficiencies have impacted not only on the services directly provided by the public sector but also on those services which the public sector resources through its grant-making or funding activity.

[6] Oxford Economics, *Quarterly Economic Indicators Research for Belfast City Council, Spring 2010*
[7] http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-labour-market/stats-labour-market-redundancies.htm
[8] http://www.insolvency.gov.uk/otherinformation/statistics/201005/index.htm

The arrival to power of a new coalition government on 11 May 2010 has signalled a singular focus on efficiency savings and the Chancellor's statement of 24 May 2010 calling for cuts of £6.2 billion in the current calendar year brings into very sharp focus the need to look again at public finances and potentially prioritise areas for focus.

Within Belfast City Council, we have been pursuing an efficiency agenda since early 2007 and have been working across the council on an Economic Downturn plan. This has helped us focus on how we, as a business, can help our local companies address this challenging operating climate.

One of the strategic themes within our corporate plan 2008-2011[9] is "**Better opportunities for success across the city". As part of this work, we strive to build p**rosperity for all people and places and to build success in our city. The council has a lead role to play, not only as a service provider but as a civic leader. In this sense, it has a role in "place-shaping" – the term used by Sir Michael Lyons in his 2006 report to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which suggested that the role of councils was to "build prosperous and cohesive communities where people want to live and work and where businesses want to invest.[10]" One of the key actions that we are trying to capture is how we, as an organisation, can better interact with the private sector in the city. The potential of a new community planning responsibility for councils may provide us with a vehicle through which we can address the wellbeing of the city by bringing together all relevant parties to agree a collective approach and a set of priorities for action, and to identify associated support and resources to make this happen. Businesses will have a key role in the development of this process and in its implementation.

[9] http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/publications/CorporatePlan2008-2011.pdf
[10] Lyons, M. 2007, *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*, The Stationery Office, London

Structural issues in the Belfast economy

However we are conscious that it is not just the short-term changes to the economy that have prompted economic development agencies to consider the scope of their work. There are structural issues within the economy which need to be addressed if sustainable change is to occur.

While the industrial base in Belfast has evolved significantly in recent years and the city is transforming itself into a dynamic, knowledge-driven economy, it remains a work in progress and there is significant imperative for those charged with promoting the development of the city to work together if our ambitions are to be achieved.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) undertook a study on Belfast in 2008 as part of its LEED (Local Economic and Employment Development) work[11]. This report noted that the success of Belfast is critical to the success of Northern Ireland and, in turn, essential if all communities are to enjoy the benefits of a more peaceful and harmonious society. It suggested that this could only come about by a range of local, regional and national interventions and that “a clear national framework of strategies and goals is required and, at the local level, effective leadership, development tools and investment resources must be available to help make development and sustainable growth happen”.

The Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government 2008-2011 includes the development of a dynamic, innovative economy as its key priority. Belfast is home to two universities and a further education college, each of which has significant research facilities and expertise which could be used to enhance the competitiveness of our existing businesses and support additional investment. Despite this, the OECD report concluded that “knowledge economy activity is still a ‘hidden jewel’ or ‘unknown asset’ in Belfast which is critical in the transition both to a more mixed economy and as a means to stem the continued outflow of highly skilled talent and to continue to attract talent from outside”.

The public sector continues to be the major employer in the city by some margin and the private sector is largely composed of micro-businesses. Half of all foreign direct investment (FDI)

[11] OECD, 2008 *Local economic strategy series: review of Belfast,* Paris

plants across the region are located in the city but the most significant growth in employment in recent years has been in lower-level service sector employment, particularly in retail (although this sector has been disproportionately affected by the recent downturn).

Business start-up levels in Belfast (and in Northern Ireland as a whole) remain stubbornly below the UK average. Figure from the 2008 GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) report for Belfast[12] indicate that the figure for early stage entrepreneurship was 3.2% which equates to around 4,500 individuals involved in a new business venture creation – from considering the idea to actually starting up a business. This compares to 4.8% in Northern Ireland as a whole and 5.5% for the UK.

Investment in R&D (research and development) in local businesses also lags behind the UK average. In-house expenditure (that carried out on the company's premises) saw a 3.6% drop from 2007-2008, against a 1.7% growth across the rest of the UK[13]. Northern Ireland has among the world's lowest percentage of GDP invested in research and development – just over 40% of the UK average.

The economic inactivity rates alluded to earlier are geographically focused (particularly in the north and west of the city) and are not forecast to improve to any extent over the next decade. This presents a significant drain on an already stretched public purse and represents a missed opportunity for engagement in the wider development of the city. It also risks placing a brake on future development.

A report carried out by Oxford Economics in early 2008 noted that 47 out of the 51 wards in Belfast were below the government employment rate at the time with 12 wards projected to have employment rates under 50% in 2015 (note: pre-recession projections). Differences in resident employment rates vary from 77% to 32% while the difference in the graduate share of working age population ranges from 59% to 2% across the council wards. This presents a clear case to address the problems of inactivity and poor levels of skills attainment, given that the market is not currently addressing the problem and does not appear likely to do so in the future.

[12] Hart, M. (2009) *Entrepreneurial activity in Belfast: results from the LEM Northern Ireland 2008 Survey*, Aston Business School
[13] http://www.detini.gov.uk/ni_r_d_statistics_2008.pdf

Why develop this plan?

The previous LED strategy "Sustaining Competitive Advantage" concluded in March 2010. As previously acknowledged, this strategy was developed in a very different economic and operational environment.

The one year plan will address the immediate imperative of supporting businesses through this difficult period and tackling key employment challenges. At the same time, it will provide space for the development of an integrated economic strategy for the city, in conjunction with Invest Ni and other key partners, in line with the new regional economic development strategy to be completed by Autumn 2010.

The plan will also tap into the growing ambition of Belfast City Council as a civic leader, taking seriously its role in shaping the city's economic future, in conjunction with its partners. Equally, it will consider how the role of the Council as an economic generator in its own right can be maximised.

How will this plan be delivered and managed?

This plan will be driven by the council's Development Committee and regular reports on progress will be brought to the committee.

The activities within the plan will be delivered in collaboration with a range of partners including Invest NI, other government departments, local enterprise agencies, universities and colleges and local communities.

The learning from these activities will feed into the council's wider ambition to create better opportunities for success across the city. Equally, it will be used to inform the content of a new integrated plan, to be in place from April 2011.

Proposed approach

Despite the relatively narrow legal, institutional and financial framework within which councils' local economic development activity takes place in Northern Ireland, this plan seeks to deliver an ambitious range of actions which will address both the short- and long-term challenges of our economy.

However we recognise that, by collaborating with our partner agencies, we can not only achieve economies of scale but also make a more significant impact on those areas of greatest challenge.

Therefore, one of the underlying principles of this plan is the need for a partnership approach, both in the development and delivery of the proposed activities.

The second principle that we want to explore is how we can maximise the economic benefit of the council as a whole. While the LED function interacts with over 1000 businesses a year, many other companies engage with the council through our other services such as licensing, waste management, street cleansing and procurement. We will seek to harness to value of these services and consider how, collaboratively, we can help our local companies achieve their potential.

We also want to ensure that our activity is needs-led. As such, we continue to use as our baseline both published and commissioned research on the key issues within this report and also engage in the sharing of best practice, to ensure that we can learn from our partners elsewhere.

Finally, we want to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility within this plan to respond to a changing environment. The events of the last year have taught us that the long-term economic projections have had to be re-cast and that new, imaginative solutions to the current problems are required, whilst not losing sight of the longer-term ambitions for competitive, sustainable economies.

This is a plan for LED activity in which Belfast City Council is engaged either directly or in partnership. It takes account of wider governmental strategies and plans including the work of Invest NI and Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in particular and recognises the vast range of activity undertaken by many agencies at local and regional level with a view to enhancing Belfast's economic growth. Its activities, we hope, complement the existing offering and respond to the needs of the business sector, as expressed to us through our ongoing engagement and through our consultation for this plan.

The emphasis of this plan is placed firmly on supporting the local business community to enhance its own competitiveness and growth potential through a range of support interventions. We have set a number of challenging but measurable targets in order to ensure that we are making an impact but it is important to recognise that the investment made may take some time before its impact can be demonstrated.

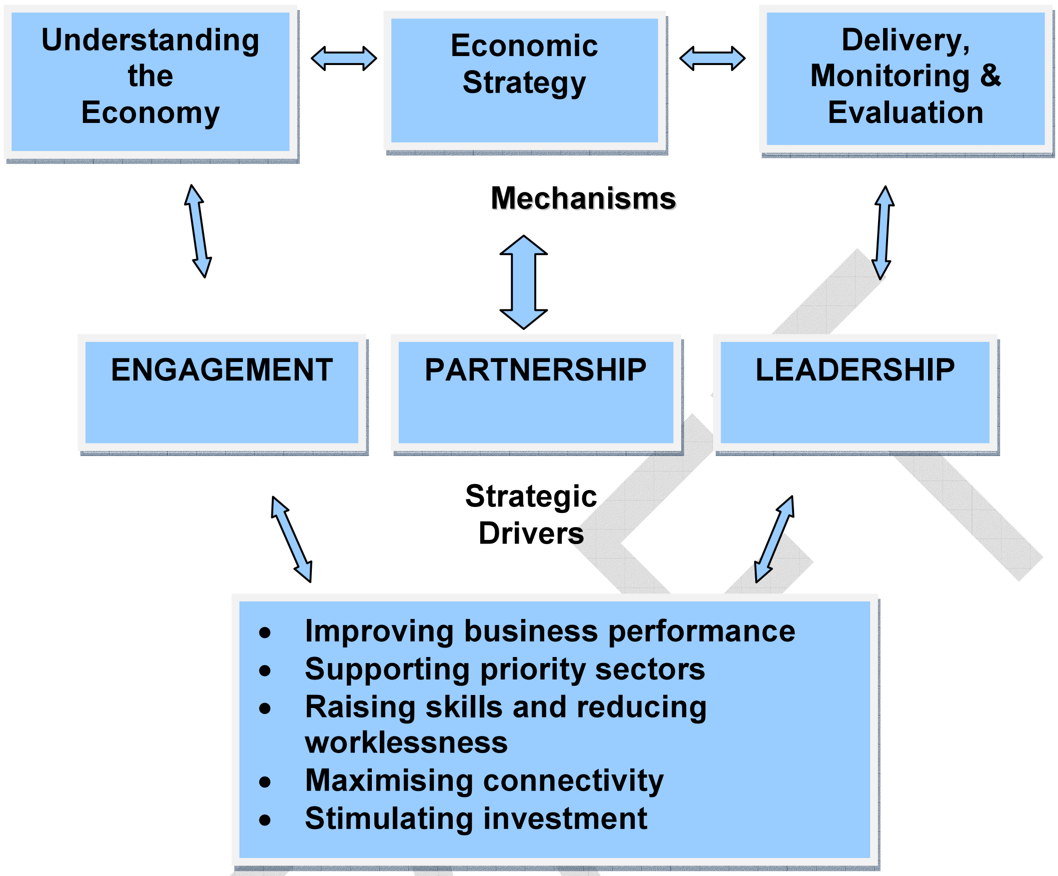
The template for the plan is based on a framework developed by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DEA) entitled "Driving Economic Prosperity"[14]. The template has been adapted to meet the local needs in our city. It brings together the spatial and thematic elements of economic development into a coherent single strategy, with sustainable development at its core.

The plan contains five strategic drivers. These are:

1. **Improving business performance**
2. **Supporting priority sectors**
3. **Raising skills and reducing worklessness**
4. **Maximising connectivity**
5. **Stimulating investment**.

Under each of these strategic drivers, there are a number of priority areas and associated outputs. Equally, the work is underpinned by ongoing research and continuous engagement with businesses to ensure a thorough knowledge of the economy. It is delivered in partnership with other business support agencies and assumes a strong local government leadership role in the local economy. Finally, an evaluation framework allows us to capture both the impacts and the outputs from our investment. This can be illustrated as follows:

[14] www.idea.gov.uk


Understanding the Economy
Economic Strategy
Delivery, Monitoring & Evaluation
Mechanisms
ENGAGEMENT
PARTNERSHIP
LEADERSHIP
Strategic Drivers
Improving business performance
Supporting priority sectors
Raising skills and reducing worklessness
Maximising connectivity
Stimulating investment

Strategic Driver 1: Improving business performance

Developing the existing business base and increasing entrepreneurial activity are widely recognised as critical drivers of economic prosperity. Successful cities typically exhibit high company birth rates, survival rates and a high rate of churn.

Belfast's industrial heritage captures the spirit of a vibrant, dynamic city as the forefront of innovation within its key industries. Today's city has changed significantly: the sectoral make-up has shifted towards the service sector, while public sector employment continues to dominate. Belfast is predominantly a city where people are employed rather than operate their own business; while recent figures show that the number of people starting their own business has increased, there is still some way to go. The 2008 GEM report for Belfast highlights the importance of making targeted investment in entrepreneurship support activities among specific groups (e.g. university graduates, social enterprises).

Recent research by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA)[15] makes the case that a small number of high growth businesses are responsible for the lion's share of job creation and prosperity, and that innovation is instrumental in the success of these businesses. Belfast is home to two world-class universities, each of which has research expertise in a range of fields including engineering, healthcare, software development, environmental management and sonic arts. There is considerable potential to enhance collaboration between academia and the business community, allowing companies to avail of these leading research facilities.

Globalisation and the accompanying intensification of competitive pressures are rapidly changing the context in which Belfast's companies operate. Business and Government are challenged to respond to globalisation by boosting our competitiveness, and that means raising our productivity. The Government has identified five drivers of productivity: investment, innovation, skills, enterprise and competition.

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2008-2011 includes the development of a dynamic, innovative economy as its key priority. Within this, the focus is on

[15] NESTA, *The vital 6 per cent: how high growth innovative businesses generate prosperity and jobs*, October 2009

addressing the structural weaknesses in our economy and focusing on growing the private sector including small and medium indigenous enterprises. It is also suggested that priority should be given to supporting growth in well-paid high-skilled jobs. However, there is also a commitment to developing the social economy, recognising the important contribution that such local economic activity promotes in both social objectives and in sustainable community development.

While some progress has been made of late, there is still some way to go. The recent Belfast City Council business survey highlighted the fact that less than half of our businesses are engaged in exporting activity (44%); less than half have a formal written business plan (47%) and over a quarter (27%) of businesses are wholly reliant on the public sector for all their business. Business have told us that they require specific support on sales development, exporting, accessing public procurement opportunities and strategic development.

The initiatives to be undertaken in this priority area will focus on improving all measures of productivity with a view to sustaining and building on recent improvements in an increasingly difficult operating market. We will also help companies identify future growth areas and will help them enhance their opportunities of winning new business through tendering opportunities. In addition, we will develop innovative approaches to helping local companies win business from some of the key development in the city e.g. Titanic Quarter.

Priority areas

We will focus our work around six priority areas:

- **Increasing business formation and survival**
- **Encouraging innovation and improving productivity**
- **Increasing environmental stability**
- **Developing new markets**
- **Supporting and retaining key businesses**
- **Promoting supply chain development and procurement opportunities**.

Increasing business formation and survival

We will work to increase both the volume and value of new business starts in the city and will work with existing businesses to help them address growth challenges and enhance their competitiveness.

Encouraging innovation and improving productivity
We will help our companies invest in product and process development initiatives, encouraging them to think about new ways of doing things that can improve their productivity.

Increasing environmental stability
We will help our companies consider business improvement initiatives by looking at environmental solutions and will promote sustainable procurement practices.

Developing new markets
We will encourage our companies to consider exporting for the first time and will also help them look at new markets.

Supporting and retaining key businesses
We will work with our existing businesses to understand how we can support their further development and will encourage the development of local supply chains, where possible.

Promoting supply chain development and procurement opportunities.
We will maximise the business opportunities arising from our key development sites and will look again at our internal procurement processes, with a view to enhancing uptake by small business and social economy businesses.

Targets
Our targets under this strategic driver include:

- At least 200 people to participate in events and programmes around pre-enterprise, exploring enterprise and business start-up. At least 20 new businesses to start up
- 350 businesses to take part in business support programmes on issues such as sales growth, franchising, export development and access to procurement. Minimum 10% increase in turnover target for all participating businesses
- 1200 businesses to attend workshops, seminars and business events.

Strategic Driver 2: Supporting priority sectors

Competitive economies tend to be those with clearly identifiable specialisms or clusters of activity which stimulate productivity growth. However successful business locations also need to be able to respond rapidly to changing market demand, harnessing the unique features or assets to enhance the businesses already present in that location while also attracting new ones.

Belfast's early industrial heritage saw it uniquely identified as a leader in shipbuilding rope making and linen production. This heavy manufacturing has given way to new sectors with the city's economy becoming more diversified. However it remains over-reliant on the public sector – like the Northern Ireland economy as a whole.

The recent OECD report on Belfast underlines the importance of focusing on an agreed range of sectors and investing in their development as a way or levering future investment returns. Support programmes, sector leadership, new commercial and industrial premises, skills development and a new entrepreneurial culture are just some of the elements which are needed to help develop Belfast companies and allow them to grasp new opportunities in regional, national and international markets.

The economy is an increasingly global one and, unable to compete on costs, we must identify those areas in which we have a distinct offering and build clusters of activity and support around those.

Belfast City Council has recently commissioned a range of specialised research to identify which business sectors are most important to the economy and which are likely to become increasingly so in the coming years. We will continue to work with our partner agencies to consider how we can invest in those sectors in which future growth is likely.

In this current plan, we will focus on a range of business sectors identified as providing significant added value to the city. These include:

Advanced manufacturing

Although the relative value and worth of the manufacturing sector in Belfast has significantly decreased in recent years, the city is still home to a number of innovative market leaders in a range of niche manufacturing fields. Over 10,000 people are employed in 385 manufacturing companies. This is in contrast to most other cities where manufacturing businesses are practically non-existent.

Availing of the research expertise at the local universities, there is an opportunity to explore new product and process development support initiatives between business and research. There is also an opportunity to explore additional clustering opportunities with larger manufacturing companies, increasing supply chain development initiatives.

Connected Health

Northern Ireland is at the core of an exciting initiative to promote connected health through the European Connected Health Campus, located at the Science Park in Belfast.

The aim of this collaborative research and industry initative is to promote improvements in patient care through the use of technology as well as fast tracking new products and innovation in health and social services by bringing together internationally renowned names within the healthcare field.

Belfast is already home to a number of innovative companies in the medical devices, sensor technology and software fields with proven expertise in the international connected health world. Through the linkages and networks offered by the European Connected Health Campus, there is an opportunity to encourage local businesses to engage in international collaboration and to stimulate further commercialisation of the research undertaken at our two universities.

Creative industries

The creative industries are growing in importance as a major business sector in Belfast. It is estimated to employ 16,000 people in over 1000 businesses. In the main, these are small companies but many show significant growth potential, given the right support.

In order to underpin the development of the creative industries sector in Belfast, we will develop and deliver a range of mentoring, sales development, marketing and promotion and product development initiatives for the creative industries businesses in Belfast. Our key sub-sectors demonstrating maximum potential for future growth include film and television, digital media, music, fashion and design.

We will also continue to explore opportunities for specific support infrastructure for the sector including incubation support and additional business space.

Environmental technologies and renewables

Within Belfast's well established advanced manufacturing sector, there is extensive experience in areas of renewable energy such as wind and marine, coupled with an abundance of skills that can be transferred to other renewable energy sources. Local research institutes based at Queen's University specialise in environmental engineering, energy from biomass and developing sustainable technologies. There is an opportunity to translate that research into commercial opportunity by raising awareness of the potential of the sector and building mutually beneficial clusters to address current and future needs.

The North Foreshore masterplan[16] identifies the opportunity to create an Environmental Resource and Recovery Park (ERRP) on the site. This will act as a focal point for the development and future of the sector, providing development sites suitable for environmental and waste management businesses involved in reducing waste, recycling materials, environmental research and renewable energy.

We will work with our private sector partners to understand how this element of the site can be taken forward for the future economic development of the city.

ICT and software development

Belfast's growing ICT sector offers expertise in a number of key areas including mobile telecoms, financial software, information management, IT security and connected health. Having grown rapidly in recent years, Northern Ireland is now the leading foreign direct

[16] http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/northforeshore/

investment region in Europe for software development centres and IT technical support centres. The majority of this investment is based in Belfast, tapping into the research and talent pool created by the city's unviersities and colleges.

The region is also home to a vibrant cluster of indigenous software firms, many of which are leading global players. Particular areas of expertise include wireless, Internet and financial services software, customer relationship management (CRM) and information management. This offers a ready supply chain for the international businesses.

We will develop a range of business development programmes and mentoring initiatives to support companies in this sector reach their potential and compete in international markets.

Independent retail

Belfast has been fortunate to receive significant investment in its retail offering in recent years, culminating in the opening of Victoria Square in 2008. This investment doubled the retail floor space in the city centre and offered new brands and attractions, bringing visitors from across the region and wider afield.

However we are conscious of the contribution that local, independent retailers can make to a city. They provide a diversity of offering and ensure that local communities and neighbourhoods have access to vital services. 3000 people are employed in the sector, working in 700 outlets. Equally, we have estimated that over half of the retail outlets in the city centre are independent retailers and this is an important and unique offering for those who travel to Belfast – breaking the "clone town" syndrome that is prevalent in some many other large cities.

We will invest in our local independent retailers to improve their business skills, help them market their services both individually and collectively and provide animation support to complement their offering and ensure that people continue to use the local facilities.

Social economy

It is estimated that there are over 1,000 social enterprises in Northern Ireland and that social economy activity accounts for approximately 5% of economic activity. The social economy can be an important driver for regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.

Following investment in the sector in recent years, there is a growing interest in groups exploring the social economy model as a sustainable revenue stream, given the increasing pressure on public budgets. There are numerous examples of best practice in Belfast and these have created an appetite for more groups to establish social economy businesses.

Working with our partners in Invest NI, we will continue to support the development of the social economy sector in the city, particularly at pre-enterprise level. We will also encourage social economy businesses to avail of al our business support programmes, aiming to have a percentage of representation from the sector in all our business growth initiatives.

Tourism development and hospitality

The hospitality sector has been one of our key growth sectors in recent years – currently employing around 17,000 people in the city within accommodation, bar and restaurant and visitor attractions. However it has suffered considerably since the downturn. We will continue to work with our partners within the industry and its representative bodies to promote excellence in service standards, increase employment opportunities and develop new products to attract additional tourists to our city.

In doing so, we will build on the potential of major investment initiatives such as Titanic Signature Project and will seek to maximise employment opportunities for local people as well as focusing on service excellence.

Targets

Our targets under this strategic driver include:

- 180 businesses to take part in sector-specific business support programmes on issues such as process development, marketing, resource efficiencies and product development. Minimum 10% increase in turnover target for all participating businesses.

3. Raising skills and reducing worklessness

The unemployment register has become swollen in an unprecedented manner over the last 18 months. Unemployment levels in the city current sit at around 7.2% - with over 11,300 people currently claiming unemployment benefit (Jobs Seekers Allowance). From an intervention perspective, it is important to note that young people and the long-term unemployment feature predominantly among these figures. Worryingly, for many young people, this could mean that they have never had an opportunity to find employment.

The level of incapacity rate claimants – the economically inactive – is also a significant concern. Currently, almost one in three of those eligible to work are not in employment. These are numerous reasons behind this, particularly those categorised as long-term sick or those looking after family/the home. However, looking forward, the forecasts suggest that, in the absence of any major welfare reform programme, there is unlikely to be a significant improvement in this figure, even over a 10 year period.

Belfast now profiles itself as a modern, dynamic economy, focused on the new, knowledge-based industries. With that in mind, the projections are that half of all future jobs will require graduate level qualifications while only one in 7 jobs will be available for those with basic qualifications.

Given the geographical disparities in skills levels, the inference is that the parts of the city are likely to remain unaffected by its future growth. In the 2001 Census year, the difference in the graduate share of working age population ranges from 59% (Malone) to 2% (Crumlin). The census also reported 14 wards with less than 50% resident employment. By 2015, 12 of those wards are to remain in this classification. These wards are concentrated largely – but not exclusively – in the north and west of the city. At this level of employment these areas look set to remain acutely disadvantaged and largely unaffected by Belfast's future economic growth.

At the upper end of the market, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are still skills shortages in some parts of the ICT and software development sectors, particularly those posts requiring "niche" experience that is unlikely to be available in Northern Ireland, given its relatively recent growth e.g. security software.

The principal responsibility for employment and skills development issues remains with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). We have been working closely with DEL and other partners over the last year as part of the Belfast Employability and Skills Board with a view to gaining a consensus on targeted initiatives to address the city's employment and skills challenges. This work will be carried forward in the coming months as we aim to agree on a number of collaborative initiatives.

Priority areas

We will focus our work around three priority areas:

- **Addressing barriers to work**
- **Improving basic skills and employability**
- **Local recruitment and development opportunities**.

Addressing barriers to work

We will continue to work with those facing the most significant challenges and at greatest distance from the labour market, developing bespoke support services to help them move towards employment.

Improving basic skills and employability

We will develop basic skills levels among those in employment as a means of career progression and will help and those seeking to find work to acquire their basic skills.

Local recruitment and development opportunities

We will maximise the employment opportunities from the Titanic Quarter, by incorporating social clauses into all public contracts and will work with all employers on the site to develop targeted employment initiatives.

Actions

- Completion of year 3 of the HARTE programme – at least 60 long-term unemployed to take part with at least 30 finding employment following their participation in the programme.
- Roll-out of the Step Up to Work initiative within Belfast City Council and collaboration with other partners to consider how it can be extended
- Establishment of TQ Work partnership to maximise job opportunities emerging from the Titanic Quarter site across all sectors.

- Identification of collaborative initiatives with Belfast Employment and Skills Board partners to address other employment challenges for specific groups or target areas e.g. youth unemployment.

Targets

Our targets under this strategic driver include:

- Completion of year 3 of HARTE programme for 60 long-term unemployed people; at least 30 to find permanent employment
- Collaboration with Human Resources to maximise uptake of Step up to Work initiative
- Delivery of TQ Work initiative, providing access to employment for at least 100 long-term unemployed in the area.

4. Maximising connectivity

We recognise the fact that, if Belfast is to become a successful city, it must do so in a sustainable manner. This means ensuring that all citizens have access to the opportunities created by the city's economic growth. Equally, it means investment in the appropriate infrastructure to ensure accessibility to services and employment. Digital connectivity is a keystone of economic growth for today's knowledge-based economies and, if we are to sell ourselves as a global competitor in these industries, it is critical that we have the technological infrastructure in place to substantiate this claim.

As previously noted, Belfast is characterised by significant disparities in terms of access to employment, skills levels, educational attainment and social mobility. While 200,000 people work in the city on a daily basis, more than half that number travel into the city for employment – mainly from adjacent districts. This places significant pressure on the infrastructure system, particularly the traffic infrastructure. While the city created an estimated 30,000 jobs in the decade from 1998-2008, the employment rate in the city did not alter significantly. This suggests that those living outside the city benefited more from the employment growth than Belfast residents. The OECD report on Belfast noted that, unlike most other cities, there is significant potential for further economic development in the city, particularly using brownfield sites that are now vacant. These sites present an opportunity and a challenge, not only in their remediation, but also in ensuring that the development fits with the surrounding landscape and does not happen in isolation from adjacent communities. The Titanic Quarter is the most advanced of these sites at present and, in order to maximise its potential, we have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Titanic Quarter. This establishes a series of actions around employment, tourism development, access to the site, housing provision, community outreach and open space.

Government in Northern Ireland has recognised the importance of investment in new technologies and DETI has recently commenced the roll-out of a £50 million pound next generation broadband project across the region. This guarantees minimum 10MB (up to maximum 40MB) per second speeds and will be particularly important for the business sector which is demanding increasingly greater bandwidth for their operations. The new Project Kelvin communications cable will also bring super fast connectivity to Northern Ireland and the

Republic of Ireland. The cable has 8 designated points of presence (POPs) in Northern Ireland and 6 in the Republic of Ireland. The POP in Belfast is located at the Northern Ireland Science Park. This will support the further growth of the knowledge industries in that location and should act as a magnet for further investment of this nature.

Targets

Our targets under this strategic driver include:

- Agreement with community and statutory partners on focus on TQ Thematic Working groups and agreements on key projects and actions for each of these
- Promotion of new communications infrastructure to local small businesses to enhance the uptake by them.

5. Stimulating investment

While it is widely acknowledged that the climate for inward investment is extremely difficult at present, there are indications that Belfast continues to punch above its weight. The city attracts the largest number of software development projects in the UK outside of London while Northern Ireland is the most successful region in the UK (on a per capita basis) at attracting Foreign Direct Investment.

Belfast is an attractive proposition to an inward investor. It has the most competitive office rental rates in the UK and, as noted, will have full access to next-generation broadband by 2011.

The city's two universities account for almost 60,000 students. Queen's University, Belfast is a member of the influential Russell Group of universities while 86% of the University of Ulster's research activity was judged to be of international quality in the 2008 RAE assessment.

The city has two airports which were used by over 8 million people in 2008. The Port of Belfast is currently the second largest port on the island of Ireland, handling almost 60% of Northern Ireland's seaborne trade and 20% of the entire island's sea traffic.

Belfast's tourism growth in recent years has been significant: in 2009, over 9million people visited the city – a growth of 2million on the previous year, despite the economic difficulties. Tourists are attracted to the city because of its natural assets and the new leisure and retail assets that have been developed in recent years. However they also come to participate in its busy events programme: Belfast hosted the Tall Ships in 2009 and is planning a series of events and developments in 2012 to commemorate the centenary of the launch of the Titanic which was built at Harland and Wolff shipyard in the city.

The impending US investment conference in October 2010 provides an opportunity to sell the city to a range of international investors, many of whom have demonstrated interest in bringing high value added, well-paid jobs to the city. This opportunity must be seized as we seek to address our short-term economic concerns and build for the longer-term economic growth of the city.

Invest NI is the key economic development agency for the region and has responsibility for delivering and supporting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – as well as indigenous business development. We will continue to collaborate with them to ensure that we use all possible opportunities to sell Belfast to potential investors. Equally, we will work with partner organisations including colleges and universities to ensure that the skills required by potential investors are provided by these institutions.

Our partner organisation – the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) – plays an important role in marketing the city to potential visitors. The development of the "B" brand and its roll-out offer opportunities for further collaboration in promoting Belfast as a business destination which has a clear sense of purpose and which benefits from significant institutional collaboration in bringing development projects to fruition.

Despite the downturn, almost £500million of development projects was unveiled in Belfast in 2009. We are currently working with our private sector development partners to influence and shape a range of development schemes with a combined value for around £3billion. We need to continue to support our private sector partners in bringing these projects to fruition and, where these do occur, we should seek to maximise the benefits for the entire city from this investment.

However, in addition to investment in our city, we must support our local businesses to look beyond city and national boundaries in their work and to consider developing new markets. Through our contacts and networks, including the World Trade Centre network, we will help local businesses develop new supply chains and consider growth in international markets.

Targets

Our targets under this strategic driver include:

- Development of an agreed approach to participation in key events e.g. MIPIM, to promote the major development opportunities in the city
- Enhanced collaboration with Invest NI on inward visits by potential investors to the city
- Engagement with Invest NI on US investment Conference in October 2010 to sell the city to its maximum potential.