



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

DRAFT RESPONSE

To

DSD PUBLIC CONSULTATION

STREETS AHEAD PHASE 3 PROPOSALS

19th December, 2014

General Comments

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on DSD Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 public consultation exercise regarding its Concept Design proposals. The Council has some general comments in the first instance, with more specific operational and maintenance considerations within the questionnaire document.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Belfast City Council: draft Belfast City Masterplan 2012-20

- Having an accessible, vibrant, attractive and dynamic city centre is a prerequisite for international competitiveness and regional growth. The city centre is the economic, social and cultural heart of Belfast as a City - it is critical to the well-being of its citizens as it is the generator of the city's wealth and finances and the delivery of services across the City area. It is not surprising therefore that the Council's draft Masterplan for Belfast, www.belfastcity.gov.uk/business/developmentplans/belfastmasterplan.aspx identifies the city centre as a specific spatial objective and one of a number of key priorities for the city as a whole.

Belfast City Council: Belfast City Centre – Initial Directions document, Urban Strategies June 2014

- Specific to the Belfast city centre, the Council has commissioned independent and international expertise to help set the development and investment priorities for the city centre area. This Initial Directions document provides an honest assessment of both the challenges and opportunities for the city and outlines some eight policies; six projects and key areas of development. The conclusions from the Initial Directions document has provided the basis of an overall regeneration strategy and investment Plan for the city centre - currently in draft format in preparation for public consultation.
- The proposals under Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 fit well with a number of identified policy areas for the city centre, for example, the need to create a green, walkable, cyclable centre. In addition it complements the efforts and focus, in the north of the city centre, to create an area of learning and innovation.
- Public realm improvement schemes have a role in contributing to urban development objectives. In Belfast city centre it can help address issues around lack of open green public space; enhancing the pedestrian experience in particular connecting the north of the city centre; and improving connectivity and the provision of additional cycle ways within city centre. Consideration should be given to how Phase 3 will provide a safe environment for cyclists in this part of the city centre which currently experiences high levels of vehicular traffic. Connecting this area with existing cycle routes in the city centre will help encourage

greater numbers of cyclists into this area and through the city centre. The Council's planned Bike Share scheme will introduce 300 bikes into the city with phase 1 focussing initially on the city centre. The Council would encourage the provision of cycle lanes and routes throughout the city where possible and Phase 3 could make a significant contribution towards this.

- The Council's draft regeneration strategy highlights Belfast Streets Ahead as a key project for the north of the city centre area – an area of the city centre in most need of radical improvement. The Council views Section 3 of the Streets Ahead Phase 3 as quite a critical component of the success of the impact and cumulative benefits of the Ulster University campus development - the new development at the Ulster University Belfast campus acting as a significant catalyst for not only for much needed regeneration in this area of the city centre, but also generating wider city and regional benefits (such as increased economic viability for the city; greater physical regeneration for the city; improved physical appearance; wider accessibility; and maximising the success of other large scale developments).

AFFORDABILITY

Resourcing large scale regeneration projects

- The budget required for the delivery of Belfast Streets Ahead Phase is estimated between £30-35million. The regeneration merit and contribution to strategic regeneration objectives of the city is highlighted above.
- Under Local Government Reform (LGR), NI Councils will see the transfer of a range of functions from central government: and specifically, the function around regeneration and the capacity to lead and deliver on physical development projects. From the initial LGR funding allocation to Belfast City Council to deliver against new regeneration functions, it was clear that it was not possible for Council to deliver a large scale project like Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3. With the date of the transfer of regeneration functions announced to be April 2016, the funding allocation is likely to be reviewed and is therefore not yet agreed.
- To help work through this capital resource issue, Council officials are working with DSD and the NI Centre for Economic Policy to inform a policy paper that will provide a basis for the NI Executive to allocate additional funds to large projects, such as Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 ie regeneration projects of regional significance.
- Work has already commenced on developing broad principles to help define regeneration projects of regional significance. For example, those which have an impact beyond the local authority area within which they are located - either due to their scale, their impact on the local economy, their tourism potential or their uniqueness, amongst other things. Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 and the Ulster University Belfast Campus project are being examined to test a potential approach and criteria to demonstrate regional significance.
- The Council will continue to work with DSD and other central government departments in the effort to develop this process to ultimately secure the necessary funds required for the delivery of a project of this scale and significance.

SUSTAINABILITY

Resourcing beyond construction completion

- A key to the success of realising the benefits of this public realm scheme will be the necessary post-construction maintenance and operational and resources – such as changes to street cleansing requirements; maintenance of litter bins, new public conveniences, public spaces (where responsibility is either currently with Belfast City Council, or new agreements of responsibility for Belfast City Council).
- At a time when the Council is in the process of implementing major changes under LGR there is an ever increasing demand on resources available. Aside from the capital costs needed for this scheme, it is also important that the whole life costs of the scheme particular to Belfast City Council, are identified, robustly measured and considered. It is recommended that DSD continue to liaise with Council to ensure the necessary maintenance and operational resource information is provided to feed into the overall Business Case for the scheme.

Concept Design Proposals – Section 1

Section 1 relates to the areas Royal Avenue, from Castle Place to North Street Junction (please refer to pages 3,4 & 5 of consultation document)

Section 1 Proposals:

- High quality natural stone materials matching that used in Donegall Place
- Public Transport buses will continue to operate on the street
- High quality street furniture
- Semi mature specimen trees down one side of street
- Opportunities for significant pieces of public art
- Feature lighting to highlight key architectural features
- Pedestrian crossing at north and south of street with 'super' wide crossing outside Castle Court

Q1. Please provide any thoughts on Section 1 in the space below

1.1 *High quality natural stone materials matching that used in Donegall Place*

Lessons learned from Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 1

- The Council recognises that the aesthetics around public realm improvement schemes are important and can support the creation of enhanced, clean, open spaces that will contribute to the continued success of Belfast as a City – a shared objective of many stakeholders.
- Phases 1 incorporated materials that, in the experience of street cleansing operations, are extremely susceptible to staining and frequently result in tacky, sticky surfaces when spillages occur. This has resulted in wide geographical areas becoming heavily stained that are much

more obvious in periods of dry, hot weather. This has generated numerous complaints about dirty streets. A consequence is more frequent power washing of these areas in order to maintain a high standard of cleanliness.

- In terms of where shop fronts abut new pavements/surfaces, there are examples of litter collecting in the cavities between the new surface and shop front. This in turn creates an unpleasant and unattractive localised space. Despite frequent street cleansing in these areas, litter accumulates unnecessarily leading to complaints that require follow up investigation and action.
- Based on the Council's experience from a street cleansing perspective we would recommend the following:
 - The use of quality, durable, sustainable and easily maintained materials that do not require frequent power washing to remove stains thereby reducing lifetime costs of the scheme in terms of maintenance.
 - Surface materials are protected with a suitable coating to assist in preserving exterior surfaces.
 - To address litter issues between cavities of new surfaces and shop fronts, to ensure that litter is prevented from accumulating through uneven crevices / gaps.

1.2 High quality street furniture

Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 1 incorporated seating that did not have solid concrete bases. This has resulted in accumulation of litter and debris underneath seating areas creating unpleasant and unattractive local environments which requires additional time to cleanse effectively. Council wish to reiterate its previous proposal to incorporate high quality street furniture that has concrete, solid bases thus preventing the unnecessary build up of debris and enabling fast and effective cleansing of the areas.

1.3 Semi mature specimen trees down one side of street

Findings from the work the Council commissioned to examine future development and regeneration of the city centre identified that the city centre has a lack of tree lined streets. Suggestions around the creation of specific 'boulevards' have been documented, and with the proposals under Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3, these will further support the need to enhance the urban city centre environment.

The Council would suggest the use of coniferous rather than deciduous varieties. The use of deciduous trees to support Phase 3 project design and aesthetics will result in street cleansing resources being allocated to collect fallen leaves to prevent blockage of drains. Over the past few years Belfast City has experienced severe flooding - where drains become blocked with fallen leaves, flooding problems become exacerbated. In these circumstances, it is suggested that suitable coniferous trees are planted to prevent any risk of additional flooding problems in severe weather conditions.

Concept Design Proposals – Section 2

Section 2 relates to areas – Library Square and Royal Avenue, including Library Street, Little Donegal Street and Union Street(part) (please refer to pages 3,4 & 6 of consultation document).

Section 2 Proposals:

- The creation of a simple but bold Library Square, setting the scene for the fine architecture that surrounds it
- The setting of Central Library on to Royal Avenue should be recognised by distinctive public realm and framing with street trees
- Feature lighting should be a key part of Library Square, making it inviting and safe at night
- The space should be one level from building to building unifying the space from the edge of Royal Avenue into the main Library Square and the new entrance to the Central Library Street
- High quality natural stone should be used to compliment the surrounding architecture

Q2. Please provide any thoughts on Section 2 in the space below

Belfast City Council vision for north area of the city

- The Council is currently finalising its draft regeneration strategy for the city centre. It has highlighted it's aspirations for the north area of the city as being home to Belfast's growing learning and innovation culture – benefiting from the location of Belfast Central Library, Cathedral Quarter, Ulster University and a proposed Creative Hub. Furthermore it is anticipated that this area of the city will be at the forefront of Belfast's digital, media and innovation activity.
- Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 proposals for this section has potential to delivery much needed enhancements to encourage foot fall to this area, bring more pedestrian connectivity between key sites, creating a more welcoming environment overall and a 'feel safe' environment at night.
- In terms of the any surface material being used, we would refer to the points raised above in Section 1.

Concept Design Proposals – Section 3

Section 3 relates to the areas Cathedral Gardens (Buoys Park) including Talbot Street, Exchange Street West, Academy Street (part), York Street, Frederick Street and interface with University of Ulster (refer to pages 3,4, 7 & 8 of consultation document)

Section 3 Proposals:

- Section of Academy Street closed to connect Cathedral Gardens and St. Anne's Cathedral
- York Street to Frederick Street should be a high quality link to the University and entrance avenue for the City Centre
- Cathedral Gardens should be a flexible public space where a number of events can occur at once
- Potential public art locations within Cathedral Gardens
- What should Cathedral Gardens be – a Garden, a Square, A Park? Or can it be all three?

Q3. Please provide any thoughts on Section 3 in the space below

Belfast City Council vision for Cathedral Gardens, and surrounding areas

- The north area of the city centre is the least attractive area of the city centre and is in much need of radical improvement. The redevelopment of the Ulster University campus will play a major role in helping to transform this area, with the Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 project a key component to the success, via the physical enhancements to the streetscape of this area.
- Recent analysis of the city centre – Belfast City Centre, Initial Directions document - identifies a lack of green open space in the city centre. As a result the Council's draft regeneration strategy clearly identifies the Cathedral Gardens as an opportunity to provide a sizable new open space, maximising the regeneration benefits of the Ulster University new Belfast campus. However the aspiration is not only for the development of the Cathedral Gardens itself, but further expansion of public open space that would combine existing open spaces at Cathedral Gardens, Writers Square and the land around St Anne's Cathedral. Section 3 of Phase 3 should contribute to this, however the proposals need to be future proofed against future aspirations and plans for this particular site.
- Specific to the Cathedral Gardens itself, this space should be regarded as the prime catalyst site that has the potential to become a vibrant, high quality, civic space. The Council has engaged with stakeholders regarding the future of the site going back as far as 2007. This has assisted the production of a development brief that would inform how this space could evolve. The Council developed the following design principles to help develop the designing of this space. The Cathedral Gardens area should be:
 1. designed to be an iconic gateway to Cathedral Quarter and the city centre, in particular taking cognisance of connectivity other strategically significant projects such as Clifton Gateway
 2. designed as a predominately green civic space
 3. designed to make connections to surrounding civic spaces and buildings
 4. designed to be fully DDA compliant
 5. designed to incorporate a high quality lighting scheme
 6. designed to showcase the surrounding architecture
 7. designed to incorporate highest quality landscape finishes and site furniture
 8. designed to be inviting, accessible with open views across the space
 9. designed to be a functional space that can host a range of civic events/exhibitions
 10. designed to be easily maintained
 11. designed to discourage anti social behaviour

Overall concept design comments

- The impression is that the proportion of green space shown within the site is minimal. The Council envisaged the site as being a predominately flat green space; accessible, well maintained and multi functional. The site should read as soft space providing relief from the surrounding harsh urban landscape.
- The overall amount of hardscape proposed raises concerns as it would compromise the aspiration and vision for the space to be open, green space. While paving works well in connecting surrounding footpaths, roadways and buildings i.e. university campus and the Cathedral, the core of this civic space should be green.
- The garden element of the scheme raises some concerns: an over-elaborate landscape feature restricts the functionality of the site and presents a long term maintenance issue for the council. The Council's previous decorative planting schemes within the site have since been removed as they obscured sight-lines across the space and proved expensive to maintain to the required standards.
- From an operational maintenance perspective, any designs should incorporate easy access for cleansing plant, machinery and vehicles to ensure that effective clean up operations can be implemented.
- The Council supports the removal of the section of Academy Street and the extension of the site to the cathedral's boundary wall. This will enhance connectivity to St Anne's Square and the MAC building. However there will need to be further examination and discussions about the ownership of this area of land, currently DRD. It would be useful to have a unified maintenance approach to the area, including any elements that are on Ulster University land, to maximise the opportunity for unified standard of maintenance of the site. That said the legal intricacies around land ownership and/or necessary service level agreements etc, need to be identified and explored further to begin the process of eventually reaching an agreement.

Consideration of other capital projects

- The Belfast Bike Share scheme which will come into effect in April 2015 and a bike docking station will be located at the Ulster University campus. The scheme is likely to be used by a wide range of users (students; residents; tourists; commuters) for the purposes of offering a sustainable mode of transport that is cheap and efficient, and improves access around the city – as mentioned in the General Comments above, this scheme will introduce 300 bikes into the city with phase 1 focussing initially on the city centre. It would be useful if the design plans could 1) integrate the bike docking station at the UU campus, showing exact location and surrounding cycling infrastructure, and 2) give consideration for cyclist access to and from the docking station.
- The Council will also install a Bronze sculpture of the Belfast boxer Rinty Monaghan within the Cathedral Gardens site. Again it would be useful if the plans could indicate the location of this

new sculpture, and the design of surrounding landscape [as part of Phase 3 Section proposals] to be mindful of the siting of this art piece.

- Consideration of connectivity to other sections of the city is important - such as the retail core; the future Royal Exchange proposals; Clifton Gateway proposals; and Girdwood development on Crumlin Road –in order to maximise overall impact of individual large scale projects.

Key Design Concept Proposals

Q4. We would welcome your views on the design concept of the proposals along with any other comments you wish to make

Other operational considerations

- Given the anticipated increase in foot fall, particularly in the north area of the city, on a practical level there are a few key issues the Council would highlight:
 - Litter Bins - additional litter bins will need to be put in place. The Council suggests litter bins that are easily maintained and have consideration of the needs of wheelchair users. Unless otherwise provided the Council will erect standard black litter bins that are currently in use across Belfast City Council area; any replacement litter bins will be similar.
 - Public toilet provision - the consideration of adequate public toilet provision is recommended and that their standards meet the British Toilet Association recommendations in terms of health & well-being, equality, social inclusion and privacy and public decency.
 - It would be useful to consider the installation and use of recycling points / hubs throughout the public realm as an opportunity to encourage recycling. Consideration is also suggested around adequate waste storage and access facilities - referring to Council's Waste Storage Guidelines for Northern Ireland.
- As part of the Council's education and awareness raising around littering, street signage in respect of littering and dog fouling will be erected. The Council would expect that the appropriate street furniture eg lamppost/lighting, allows for the erection of such signage, taking into consideration visibility by wheelchair users.
- During the construction period it would be helpful if any disruption to Waste Collection Services for both residential and commercial customers could be minimised. The Council suggests that during this time there is close liaison and communication with our Waste Collection Team.

Contact Details

No individual will be identified in the analysis of responses, however under the Freedom of Information Act anonymised individual responses may be disclosed.

Q5. Please provide your details below

Gerry Millar
Director of Project and Projects

Property and Projects Department
1st Floor Adelaide Exchange
24-26 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GD

Equality Impact Assessment

DSD intends to carry out equality screening on the Belfast: Streets Ahead Phase 3 Project in line with the Department's Equality Scheme and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In light of this we would appreciate your comments in order to inform the screening process.

Q6. Do you consider that any element(s) of the proposals impacts adversely on any of the Section 75 groups?

Section 75 Groups	Yes	No
Persons of different religious belief		√
Political opinion		√
Racial group		√
Age		√
Marital status		√
Sexual orientation		√
Men and women generally		√
Persons with a disability and persons without	√	
Persons with dependents and persons without	√	

Q7. If you answered yes to any of the questions on the previous page please tell us:

(a) How do you think these groups would be adversely affected?

Persons with a disability:

- Litter bins should be easily accessible

- Streets, gardens, paths etc must be suitable for wheelchair use, those with mobility impairments, and take into consideration needs of blind/partially sighted individuals.

Persons with dependents

- Streets, gardens, paths etc must be suitable for use by older people and young children.

(a) What alternative action might mitigate or lessen any adverse impact on these groups?

- Ensure street furniture allows for sufficient number of litter bins to be erected at a suitable height for access by wheelchair users and that litter bins are easily accessed.
- Ensure that there are suitable paths and access routes for wheelchair, push chair use and those with mobility impairments.
- Ensure surface of paths and access routes are suitable for wheelchair use and will not cause instability issues for older people and young children.
- Ensure an assessment and input at concept design stage is given to those who are blind or partially sighted.

(b) What changes to the proposals might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations?

No further comment

DRAFT