



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast City Centre / Northside Urban Village Draft Regeneration Framework
Date:	11 June 2008
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Relevant Background Information

The Draft Regeneration Framework for North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre constitutes proposed supplementary guidance to the Department for Social Development (DSD) Regeneration Policy Statement for Belfast City Centre adopted by the Department in April 2004. It sets out further guidance on the proposed range of mix and location of uses for the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre to maximise the physical, social and economic regeneration of the area. The North West Quarter Part 2 comprises the neighbourhood of Brown's Square, Carrick Hill and Press / Library Quarters. Northside Urban Village concept plan is attached as **Appendix 1**. Council responded comprehensively in January 2007 to the North West Quarter Part 2; Baseline Regeneration Issues Report. A copy of this response is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Key Issues

The report has addressed the issues within this area under three broad themes, Urban Design Analysis, Vision and Concept Plan and Urban Design and Land Use. Detailed below are the proposed comments from the Council relating to these themes.

Urban Design Analysis

- Background

Draft BMAP designates the area as CC013 Scotch and Cathedral Quarters.

Character Area and outlines urban design criteria for the area. The Council would request clarification on how the regeneration framework relates to the local area plan. The neighbourhoods of Brown's Street and Carrick Hill are designated as Protected Housing Areas in City and Town Centres in BMAP which means the spread of commercial uses will be resisted.

- Character

The Council supports the recognition of the historic character, landmarks and views in the North West Quarter area. The incorporation of cultural heritage into revitalisation of the area should be seen as an asset and unique selling point.

- Open Space

An assessment of the need for open space within the city centre living areas is needed. The public space has to be created and managed in a sustainable way to ensure a well used public asset for the wider area.

- Access Movement

The Council considers that the high levels of community severance at Millfield and Carrick Hill due to the high capacity and over designed road system must be recognised and addressed as a priority. The framework should also consider the impact in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport plan such as the completion of the inner ring road and traffic management problems.

- Strengths and Opportunities

1. Draft BMAP identifies a number of Development Opportunity Sites contained in the area such as: CC 035 Castle Court and the lands to the north, CC 037 Little Donegal Street / Carrick Hill, CC 038 Stephen Street, CC 039 Library Street, CC 041 Kent Street, CC 040 Carrick Hill / North Street, CC 050 Clifton Street, CC 051 Gardiners Place / Peters Hill and CC 052 Millfield / Wilson Street. However Draft BMAP lacks information on the key site requirements for the development of these sites.
2. The Council considers that the Regeneration Framework should identify development opportunity sites within the area and provide further key site requirements in order to promote and give certainty to the potential developers or investors. A number of the sites are in public ownership and phasing of these development sites could be programmed. The concept plan fails to follow through with concrete proposals for the area and build on the analysis in Draft BMAP.
3. Gateway Designations have also identified in Draft BMAP at the junction of North Street and Carrick Hill and Millfield and the junction of Donegal Street and Carrick Hill. Additional smaller gateway sites have been identified in regeneration framework with little guidance on how to take these forward.

Vision and Concept Plan

The Council would support the vision for the area emphasising high quality urban form and building on the strong historic character of the area.

- Press / Library Quarter

The Council considers the area too large for evening economy dispersal and would consider other uses appropriate such as independent retail and small offices. The promotion of creative industries in this area would be strongly supported by the Council. The provision of incubation space close to the University may encourage greater spin out companies and opportunities for graduates from the art, design and technology courses.

Creative industries work best in an area where there is also a critical mass of other services e.g. cafes and bars, Leisure facilities and living accommodation. The University of Ulster has recently commissioned a study on business incubation for the Creative Industries. It would be important that the findings of this work feed into any further work on this framework, linking creative industries and retail there is an opportunity for supporting independent retailers in showcasing new designers, products and fashion.

At 150 sq.m as an average size for retail units independent retailers may find that these are too large. It may be more appropriate to look at a range of smaller units within designated areas, possibly within the Press / Library Quarter. Independent retail will be an important element of service provision in the context of the Urban Village that DSD are promoting.

The Council would strongly support guidelines to ensure future residential development in this area is high quality and of a scale appropriate for the area. The recent high rise apartment development on the junction of Library Street and Union Street is of poor quality design, and out of scale with the surrounding area and has ground floor level parking creating a dead frontage. Mixed use development with active ground floor frontages such as retail and office and residential above should be promoted in this area.

As previously mentioned the Council considers that development opportunity sites should be identified and key site requirements to promote and guide future use should be outlined.

- Brown's Square and Carrick Hill

The Council considers that the high levels of community severance at Millfield and Carrick Hill is an issue which must be addressed as a priority. The roads are generally wide with four or five lanes in some parts and the option of reducing the amount of road space dedicated to the car should be considered. There is also a need to improve pedestrian priority create connections along desire lines and reduce the physical and psychological barriers created by the high capacity road infrastructure. There are recent examples in Nottingham where the inner ring road system is being revamped to improve pedestrian movement.

The issue of the quality of life in the residential areas backing onto the Westlink at Brown Street and fronting onto Carrick Street should be recognised in terms of noise and air quality.

Opportunity exists to introduce student accommodation.

The Council requests clarification on what is proposed at the Gateway designation at junction of Divis Street and Westlink.

Opportunities exist in the Brown Street area next to the playground to create an opportunity meeting point, for additional recreational and community activities.

- Millfield

The Council considers that an opportunity exists to open up the Belfast Metropolitan College site at Millfield and connect it to the surrounding area. Currently the site has security fencing, with poor access and poor connectivity to the surrounding areas. There is a green open space within the site which is poorly used and the college buildings are developed around a car park, which is the centre of the courtyard.

Urban Design and Land Use

The Council would request further urban design and land use principles to be considered:

- Public and Private developers should have an obligation to provide public realm in their projects to contribute to an attractive urban village.
- Environmental sustainability guidelines or targets should be set.
- Active ground floor frontages should be encouraged in the Press and Library Quarters.

Resource Implications

None to Belfast City Council.

The implementation of the eventual adopted framework by DSD is subject to market response, available funding, economic appraisal and satisfying all statutory requirements.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that Council endorse the Draft Regeneration Framework for the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre as a tool to promote the regeneration of the area subject to the clarification, and comments detailed in this report and the formal BCC response, attached in **Appendix 3**.
2. It is also recommended that Council promote community involvement as an additional factor in all aspects of the regeneration process. Recognition of Community ensures ownership and acceptance of initiatives.
3. It is recommended that Council also considers the promotion of high quality design has to be established as one of the main principles early on in the process as it can increase the value of the land and attract investor interest and ensure local ownership and pride in the area

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Northside Urban Village Concept Plan
Appendix 2 – BCC Response to North West Quarter Part 2; Baseline Regeneration Issues Report.
Appendix 3 – Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village Draft Regeneration Framework Response from Belfast City Council

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