

# **BELFAST CITY CENTRE NORTHSIDE VILLAGE DRAFT REGENERATION FRAMEWORK**

## **RESPONSE**



Belfast City Council  
May 2008

## **Introduction**

The Council welcomes a Regeneration Framework for the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre as a tool to promote the regeneration of the area.

The key regeneration principles outlined in Paragraph 7: connectivity; maximise physical social and sustainable regeneration; retain the historic character; social exclusion and environmental sustainability are supported as important guidelines for the regeneration of the area.

The Council would promote community involvement as an additional factor in all aspects of the regeneration process. Recognition of community interests at an early stage ensures ownership and acceptance of initiatives.

The Council also considers that 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.

## **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 Draft 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 NW quarter area. The incorporation of cultural heritage into revitalisation of the area should be seen as an asset and a unique selling point. The specific comments of our Health and Environmental Services department are detailed below.

The proposals outlined indicate additional residential, retail and leisure use within the proposed geographical area and, as such, would require potential developers and other parties to pay due regard and attention to the following areas:

- Public toilet provision in the areas identified.
- Waste disposal and collection mechanisms in both residential and commercial properties. Both residential and commercial developers or other interested parties should make contact with Belfast City Council, Waste Management Service, on 028 90320202, Ext. 3680, for technical guidance and advice.
- Both street recycling bins and litter provision in the areas identified.

*If you require further clarification, contact Maria McAleer, Policy & Compliance Officer, Waste Management Service, Ext. 3639.*

Our Building Control Service has made the following comments:

The proposals outlined indicate additional residential, retail and leisure use within the proposed geographical area and, as such, would require potential developers and other parties to pay due regard and attention to the following key areas:

- There are a number of unlicensed sex shops in the 'North West Quarter Part 1'. This may have a detrimental impact upon any development undertaken.
- The Building Control Service can assist in providing advice and direction to developers in regard to environmental sustainability in the design and use of materials for construction.
- The Building Control Service can assist in development proposals designed to reflect the historic character of the area given the Service's responsibilities in terms of Street Naming.

*If you require further clarification, contact Mark Mulholland, Policy, Research and Legal Officer, Building Control Service, Ext. 2373.*

#### 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 asset for the wider area. The specific comments from our Parks and Leisure Department are detailed below.

In terms of open space owned / managed by the Council within the boundaries of the Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village draft regeneration framework, the Parks & Leisure Department would highlight:-

- a. Carrick Hill; and
- b. Brown's Square Playgrounds.

The Council would make the point that significant value and progress, in terms of regeneration could be made by investing in existing public space and the facilities which already exist within the boundary of Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village draft regeneration framework – namely, the two sites named above. The mapping and catchment socio-economic data for these areas is attached in **Appendix 1**. The socio-economic data and the significant deficiencies highlighted by the draft BMAP open space assessments for both areas makes the case for increased regeneration and the need for new open space. Significant benefits would be gained through some smaller level investment in the sites which already exist within the confines outlined in the draft regeneration framework.

The Council supports the purposes of the concept plan in 'linking' open spaces / green spaces in the City and 'improving local connections' and would highlight that the Cathedral Gardens area, which abuts the boundary on the map represents a prime opportunity for redevelopment and regeneration.

The DSD's public realm strategy details the Cathedral Gardens area as the number one catalyst project in the city, agreeing that Cathedral Gardens was a prime location for a public realm regeneration scheme. The strategy highlighted that the Cathedral Gardens open space is;

*"Strategically placed to service the entire City Centre and its adjacent uses, and aims to provide Belfast with much needed public urban parks of a scale that can facilitate a large number of major uses as well as local recreation."*

The proposed development outlined in the Belfast City Centre Northside Plan may lead to an increase in the levels of anti-social behaviour which already exist in the Cathedral Gardens space if it remains on the fringe of high quality development and is not considered as a vital "link" to the development proposed.

The Council undertook consultation in 2007 with regard to the development of the Cathedral Gardens and it was highlighted by all those consulted (University of Ulster, PSNI, Environment & Heritage Service and DSD) as extremely valuable open space in an area of the city which is in need of open space. Some comments raised by those consulted included that the open space;-

- Must be retained and regenerated as public green space;
- Needs to link to surrounding public space;
- Must become a gateway to the Quarter and the City Centre;
- Must be made safer at night – with a high quality lighting scheme to make the site safe at night;
- Should encourage more civic / cultural events; and
- Must showcase the architecture.

The Council has further concerns that this regeneration proposal will continue to disassociate the Cathedral Gardens from the rest of the Cathedral Quarter, where there has been significant high quality development which further serves to dislocate Cathedral Gardens from its neighbours.

The Council supports the high quality development proposed in the regeneration framework but would emphasise that it is essential that the associated uses proposed for the high-quality public space at the centre of the area [green heart] would need to "relate" to the area in order to ensure that the area, much like the Cathedral Gardens area, does not become a redundant / derelict space "after hours". It is essential that the associated development not only increases footfall in the area but also uses the area as a link route, helping to feed traffic through the area.

The Council supports the development of the "NWQ Gateways" which are also valuable areas of open space, which could be considered "neutral" space and offer opportunities for making the connections / linkages to the existing open spaces and to improve footfall through the area, positively contributing to the "animation" of the space and offering potential users / customers the associated uses of commercial focus.

#### 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 North West quarter area of future transport proposals contained in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport plan such as the completion of the inner ring road and traffic management proposals.

#### **Strengthens and opportunities**

Draft BMAP identifies a number of Development Opportunity Sites contained in the area such as: CC 035 Castle Court and lands to the north, CC 037 Little Donegal Street/Carrick Hill, CC 038 Stephen Street, CC 039 Library Street, CC 041 Kent Street, CC040 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.

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 developments 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.

Gateway Designations have also been 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 the regeneration framework with little guidance on how to take these forwards.

### **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 Council's comments are detailed below:

1. This is an excellent location as there many businesses who want to be located in this part of town. Companies that are currently based in areas such as Cotton Court and the managed workspace in Royal Avenue are planning to move from here due to increased rents and it would be good to put in place an infrastructure which supports a critical mass of companies in this sector.
2. The fact that the incubation space is close to the University may encourage greater spin out companies and opportunities for graduates from the art, design and technology courses. It would also help attract companies to this location, where they could attract graduates with the skills that they need.
3. Consideration would need to be given to the management of an incubation strategy that supported the businesses in the initial stages of development but then encouraged them to move on to new premises (probably at market value). The functioning of such a strategy will depend on developing linkages with the university and other support services to help the businesses develop and to support them with issues such as access to technology, finance etc.
4. 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. Therefore we would endorse a mixed-use development and feel that this would support use of the area all through the day.
5. The Council understands that 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
6. If the area is to be designated as an area that will attract the creative industries, there are a number of questions around the management/ownership and the technology – probably issues for consideration at a later stage.

7. It may also be worthwhile considering other creative uses – for example studio space for TV production – Maysfield is no longer in use and it would be worthwhile thinking of small studio space for this type of thing.

With regard to retail, the Council would make the following comments:

- Linking in with the creative industries, there is an opportunity for supporting independent retailers in showcasing new designers / products / fashion etc coming out from the design courses in the
- At 150sqm as an average size for the retail units, independent retailers may find that this is too large. Independent retailers are to be encouraged, it may be 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 trying to create in this area.

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, out of scale with the surrounding area and has ground floor level car 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 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 environment.

The issue of the quality of life in the residential areas backing onto the Westlink at Brown Street and fronting onto Carrick Hill 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 a community 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

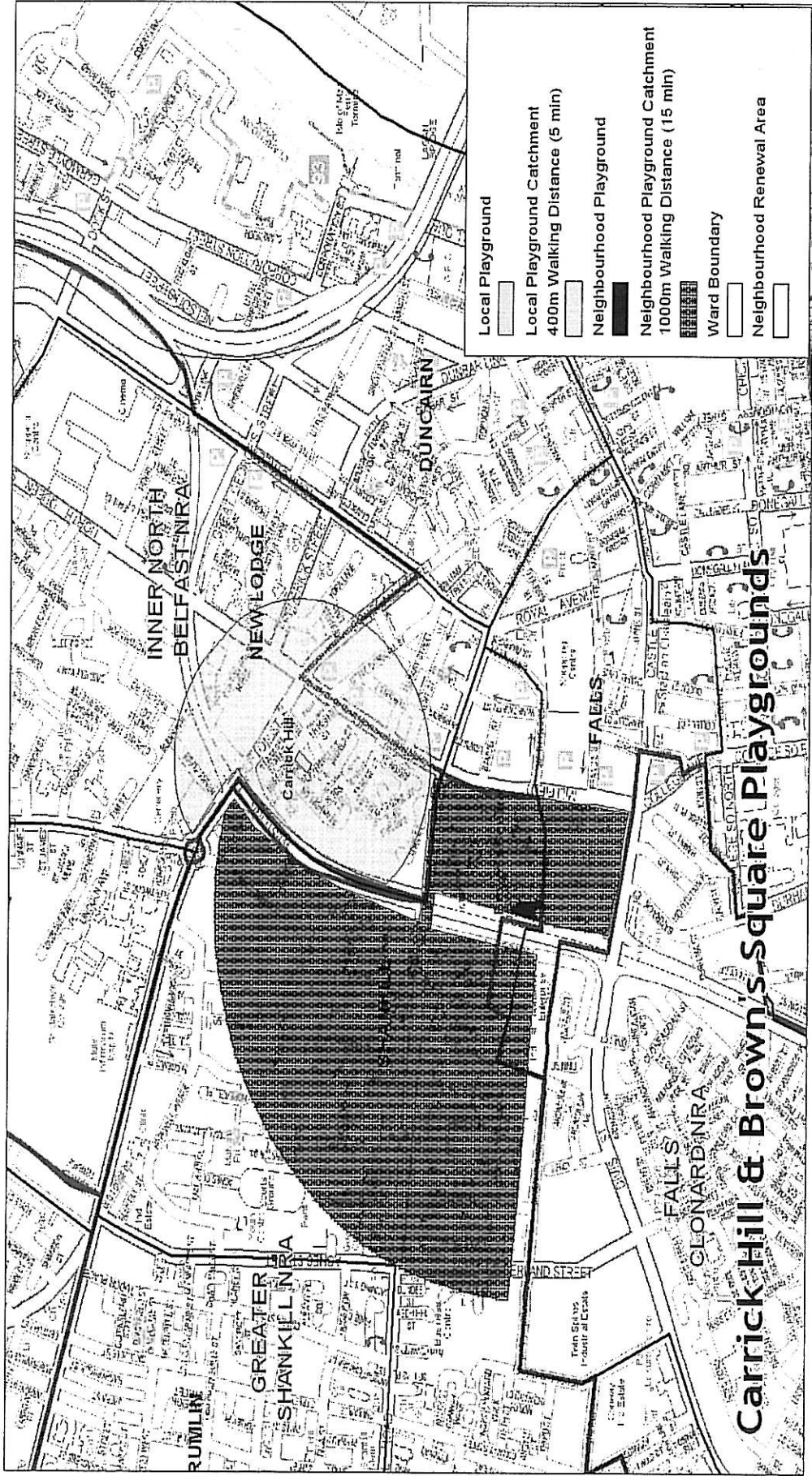
security fencing, with poor access and poor connectivity to the surrounding area. There is green open space within the site which is poorly used and the college buildings are developed around a car park, which is in the centre of the courtyard.

### **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

Appendix 1: Mapping and boundary socio-economic data for Carrick Hill & Brown's Square Playgrounds.





### **Browns Square Playground**

- Browns Square Playground sits within the **Shankill Ward** which is the **most deprived ward in N.Ireland**. The playground is also within the **Greater Shankill Neighbourhood Renewal Area**.
- 35.6% of people in the Shankill Ward have a Limiting Long Term Illness (24.2% in Belfast).
- Population density in Shankill Ward is almost double the average density of Belfast (40.81 persons/Ha)
- Open space assessments undertaken as part of **draft BMAP** show that there is a **total deficiency of 14.6 acres of outdoor playing space** within the Shankill Ward, including **12.1 acres of outdoor sport** and a **2.5 acre deficiency of casual play areas and equipped playgrounds**.
- Output area statistics show that **1799 people live within a 15 minute walk of Brown's Square Playground** including **224 children under 9 years old** and **181 young people aged 10-15 years**.

### **Carrick Hill Playground**

- Carrick Hill Playground sits within **the New Lodge Ward** which is the **5<sup>th</sup> most deprived ward in N.Ireland**. The playground is also within the **Inner North Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area**.
- 32.4% of people in the New Lodge Ward have a Limiting Long Term Illness (24.2% in Belfast).
- Population density in New Lodge Ward is approx. 3 times the average density of Belfast (72.95 persons/Ha).
- Open space assessments undertaken as part of **draft BMAP** show that there is a **total deficiency of 29.8 acres of outdoor playing space** within the New Lodge Ward, including a **20.7 acre deficit of outdoor sport** and a **9.1 acre deficit of casual play areas and equipped playgrounds**.
- Output area statistics show that **572 people live within a 5 minute walk of Brown's Square Playground** including **65 children under 9 years old** and **60 young people aged 10-15 years**.

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