



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Special Development Committee
Subject:	Yorkgate Junction
Date:	11 November 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 Keith Sutherland, Planning & Transport Policy Mgr, ext 3578

Relevant Background Information

This report provides background on the previous consideration by the Committee in respect of the initial Yorkgate Junction consultation with the Council.

Key Issues

A request for initial comments in respect of the proposed Yorkgate junction modifications were received from consultants (Scott Wilson Consultants) acting on behalf of the Department for Regional Development.

The initial responses to the consultation on behalf of Council were based on technical comments, previous submissions or existing information (**Appendix 1**). These comments were reported to the Committee in August 2008.

The Council through engagement in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and associated documents presented a consistent approach to proposals for the development of new transport infrastructure such as the inner ring and Sydenham by-pass. The Yorkgate junction proposals would be considered to have similar potential impacts in relation to the immediate area and wider city.

The Council has previously raised a number of strategic and policy concerns in relation to such proposals. The junction proposal involves increasing the road network capacity in an area where there is existing residential accommodation within an inner city location. As indicated there are implications in relation to air quality management and the impact the development of this infrastructure may have on the local residential accommodation or existing communities.

This proposal should be supportive of the need to consider alternatives to increased road infrastructures and the potential for smarter choices as outlined in the Government

White paper on *The Future of Transport* and supported by the transportation unit of the DRD Roads Service. A corridor plan for the wider area should integrate the development of sites, in particular housing and employment, with the proposed transport network and will provide a phased programme for the implementation of improvements to transport infrastructure and services that enhance accessibility for all members of the constituent communities.

The Council has highlighted concerns regarding the negative impact of new road infrastructure in terms of the increased severance of the inner city communities from the city core and the potential for the existing separation to be exacerbated by inappropriate infrastructure. In addition to evaluating or addressing the existing severance presented by the junction the potential for new severance should be addressed in relation to the proposals both from the base position and for projected junction operating capacities.

The consideration of the route options in this corridor and wider context should also address opportunities for any new road configurations to be developed as more traditional urban streets to maximise connectivity and ensure minimisation of potentially adverse impacts on the surrounding communities.

The consideration of the junction options as part of a broader area allows the assessment of the opportunities for the reallocation of existing potentially surplus road space within the surrounding network. Any increase in the efficiency of the proposed junction arrangements should deliver direct positive impacts for the northern city centre and surrounding communities. The redesign of Dunbar Link and the reduction in road space could contribute to enhanced connectivity within the city centre and the integration of the areas to the north of the Frederick Street/ Dunbar Link axis.

It should also be noted that the Council has highlighted concerns in respect of the potential impacts proposals may have on air quality in this area. The potential air quality impacts for existing and any proposed residents are likely to require proposals to be accompanied by detailed air quality assessments.

The initial response is provided for information and Members are requested to note the contents as context to the proposals for the Yorkgate Junction modifications.

Resource Implications

There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

It is recommend that Committee note the contents of this report and the appended information papers as context to the presentations on the Yorkgate Junction proposals.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 Initial Responses to the Department for Regional Development
Requests for information in respect of the Yorkgate Junction area

APPENDIX 1

Development Department

Your reference

Our reference KS/P&T/89101

Being dealt with by Keith Sutherland (ext: 3578)

Date 7th July 2008

Mr Gareth Coughlin
Senior Environmental Scientist
Scott Wilson
Beechill House
Beechill Road
Belfast
BT87RP

Dear Mr Coughlin,

Re: M2/M3/A12/York Street Interchange – Environmental Assessment

I refer to your letter dated 28 May 2008 and subsequent discussions concerning relevant constraints or factors that should be taken into account when considering the proposed junction arrangements.

As discussed, any issues arising in relation to the technical aspects, highlighted by the Environmental Protection Unit, should be progressed through direct liaison with Roisin Kerr and her colleagues. The Council would, however, have additional observations and comments, in addition to those outlined by Environmental Protection Unit in separate correspondence dated 1st July 2008.

The more general observations and information relate to policy and operational issues in respect of existing Council assets and potential developments that lie within the broad area of interest identified on the plan appended to your correspondence (S105296/E/SK001). Each of the different elements is considered in turn below.

Council Assets

The Council has interests (through ownership and lease) in a number of properties within the identified area of study as identified on the appended plan. These properties or facilities include:

- Albert Memorial Clock
- North Queen Street Playground
- North Queen Street Playcentre
- Corry Place Port Health Unit
- Custom House Square Public Conveniences

The enclosed plan also identifies, for information, additional property adjacent to the area of interest for the Environmental Assessment. The Council would obviously have a particular interest in relation to potential environmental or operational impacts on the use or maintenance of these facilities/ properties.

Council Policy

The Council through engagement in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and associated documents presented a consistent approach to proposals for the development of new transport infrastructure such as the inner ring and Sydenham by-pass.

The Council has previously raised a number of strategic and policy concerns in relation to such proposals. The junction proposal involves increasing the road network capacity in an area where there is existing residential accommodation within a city centre location. As indicated there are implications in relation to air quality management and the impact the development of this infrastructure may have on the local residential accommodation or existing communities. This proposal should be supportive of the need to consider alternatives to increased road infrastructures and the potential for smarter choices as outlined in the Government White paper on *The future of Transport* and supported by the transportation unit of the DRD Roads Service.

In relation to transport infrastructure and the integration of land-use planning and transportation the Council advocated the preparation of Transport Corridor plans as part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Inquiry. In addition to the existing five transport policies the Council proposed an additional Transport Policy in relation to the preparation of Corridor Plans. "Transport Corridor Plans (as required by SPG-BMA3) will be prepared for each of the Metropolitan Transport Corridors (identified in RDS Diagram 5). The Transport Corridor Plans should integrate the development of sites, in particular housing and employment, with the proposed transport network and will provide a phased programme for the implementation of improvements to transport infrastructure and services that enhance accessibility for all members of the constituent communities.

It was proposed that all development proposals within the Metropolitan Transport Corridors should be compatible with the relevant Transport Corridor Plan which will identify where the application of differential parking and access standards may be applied to take account of both existing accessibility and proposed enhancements. Transport Assessments prepared in support of development proposals would be required to contribute appropriately towards the implementation of identified transport infrastructure and services in accordance with the Transportation Strategy.

The consideration of the route options in this corridor and wider context should also address opportunities for any new road configurations to be developed as more traditional urban streets to ensure minimisation of potentially adverse impacts on the surrounding communities. The Council would also have concerns regarding the negative impact of the new road infrastructure in terms of the severance of the inner north communities from the city core and the potential for the existing separation to be exacerbated. In addition to evaluation or addressing the existing severance presented by the junction the potential for new severance should be considered in relation to the proposals both from the base position and for projected junction operating capacities.

The consideration of the junction option in the context of the broad area of assessment (identified on plan SK001) requires the assessment of the opportunities for the reallocation of existing potentially surplus road space within the surrounding areas. Increased efficiency of the proposed junction arrangements should have a positive impact on the northern city centre in relation to potential for the redesign of Dunbar Link and the reduction in road space that could contribute to enhanced connectivity within the city centre and the integration of the areas to the north of the Frederick Street/ Dunbar Link axis.

Council Proposals

In relation to Council potential future developments or responsibilities there are two distinct issues that you may wish to take into account as part of your study and future considerations:

- the proposed Skate Park
- current discussions in relation to the transfer of former Laganside assets.

The proposed Skate Park would be located on land below the current cross river bridge off-ramp to the rear of properties on Nelson Street and Little Patrick Street. This facility is to be developed on land owned by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company utilising both Council and external resources.

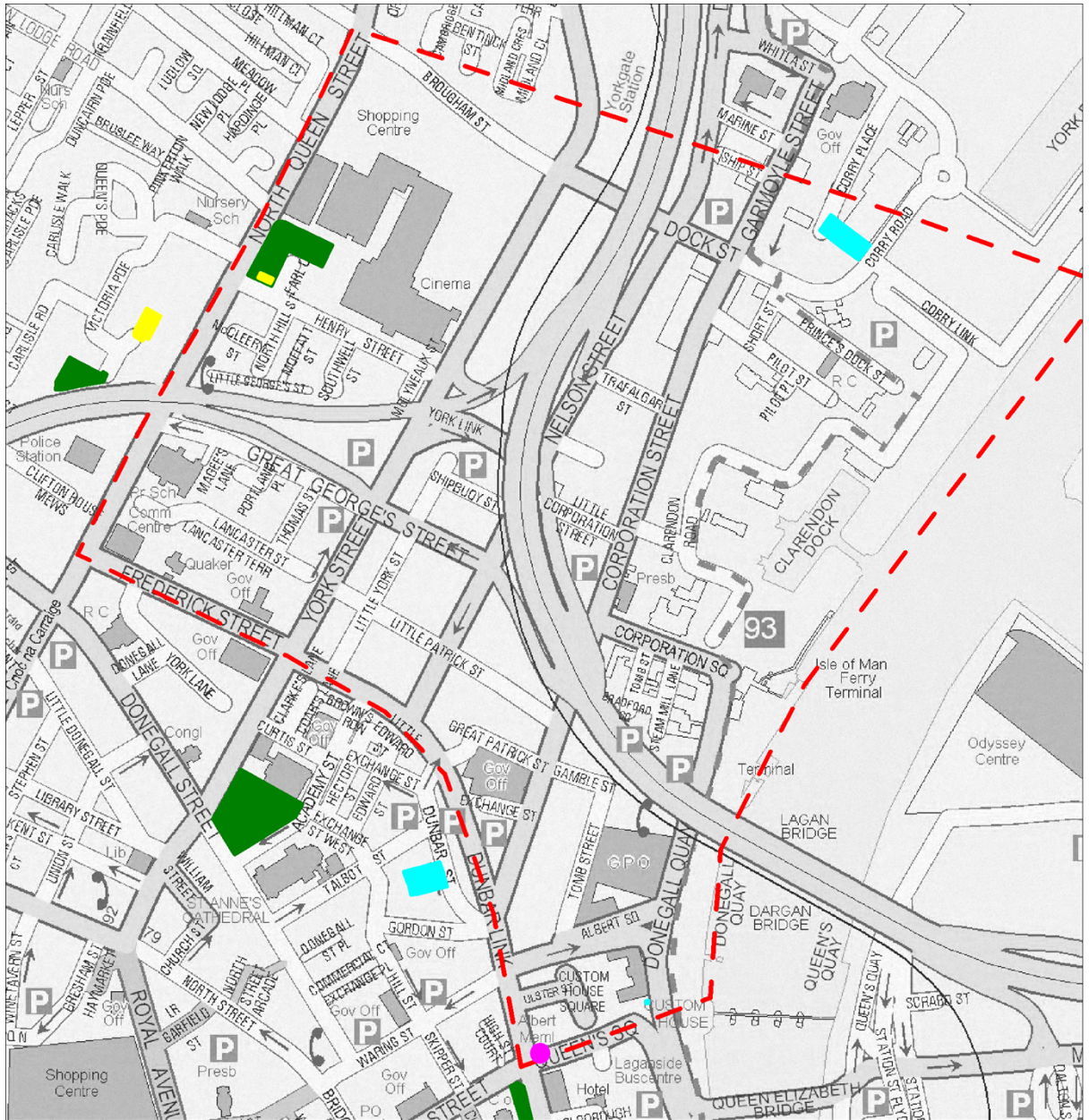
Laganside Development Corporation previously owned a number of sites within the area which are currently administered by the Department for Social development. The Council is currently in negotiations with the Department in relation to the transfer of these assets that include Custom House Square, Lagan Weir & Lookout and adjoining lands.

Whilst there are no specific development proposals for these sites the Council would, as above, have a particular interest in relation to potential environmental or operational impacts on the use or maintenance of these facilities/ properties.

The Council would, therefore, welcome the opportunity for further discussion of the scheme and the potential implications once your initial scoping activity has been completed. In order to ensure ongoing coordination, outside of that in respect of the detailed air quality issues, I would suggest that future correspondence or contact is channelled through Keith Sutherland (sutherlandk@belfastcity.gov.uk or 028 9027 0559)

Yours sincerely,

Marie Thérèse McGivern
Director of Development



1st July 2008

Mr Gareth Coughlin
Senior Environmental Scientist
Scott Wilson
Beechill House
Beechill Road
Belfast
BT87RP

Dear Mr Coughlin,

RE: M2/M3/A12/YORK STREET INTERCHANGE – ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

I refer to your letter dated 28 May 2008 requesting information regarding relevant constraints or factors that should be taken into account when considering the above junction arrangement. Our comments are as follows:

AIR QUALITY

I would advise you that as part of the National Air Quality Strategy the Council carries out reviews and assessments of air quality within Belfast. These have identified areas where the prescribed National Air Quality Objectives are or are likely to be exceeded. This proposed road scheme lies within an area that has been declared as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). This area was declared for predicted exceedences of both the nitrogen dioxide and particulate material annual mean objectives as well as exceedences of the particulate matter 24 hour mean objective and the nitrogen dioxide 1 hour mean objective. This area is described as the M1-Westlink corridor AQMA and its location can be viewed at www.airqualityni.co.uk/laqm_sca.php.

This department is concerned that the proposed development may have a significant impact on air quality in this area and possibly expose residents to poor air quality; we would therefore request that the proposal is accompanied by a detailed air quality assessment. This assessment should employ a suitably robust atmospheric dispersion model, should have regard to recent, up-to-date guidance and best practice for air quality dispersion studies and specifically include:

1. A detailed description of the proposed scheme including: traffic flow predictions before and after construction (to include AADT, AM Peak and PM Peak), predicted traffic emissions (vehicle composition, speed, etc), nearby current receptors and any future potential receptors.

2. A detailed atmospheric model of the existing air quality surrounding the proposed scheme which takes into account:
 - a. existing and surrounding sources of air pollution,
 - b. background air quality concentrations
 - c. meteorological data
 - d. the surrounding topography
 - e. the surrounding surface features that may effect dispersal.
3. In order to determine the robustness of this modelled baseline prediction verification against monitored data that has been derived following Government Technical Guidance Document LAQM TG(03) is required.
4. A modelled prediction of the air quality surrounding the proposed scheme for the year that the development is due to be operational without the development in place. This prediction should take account of forecasted traffic flow increases surrounding the proposed scheme.
5. A modelled prediction of the air quality surrounding the proposed scheme with the development in place and operational.
6. A comparison of the impacts on air quality as a result of this proposed scheme is required and compared against current and proposed EU Limit Values and UK Air Quality Strategy Objectives. The assessment must take into account all relevant exposure and potential impacts on the declared AQMA.

I trust that this is satisfactory. If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me on the number shown above.

Yours sincerely,

Roisin Kerr
Environmental Health Officer
(Environmental Protection)