



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Renewing Communities Local Concept Masterplans
Date:	13 January 2010
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Background Information

The Development Committee in February 2008 received a presentation in relation to the development of the five local area Masterplans within Belfast, by RPS on behalf of the Department for Social Development.

The areas are:

- Lower Shankill
- Crumlin Road (including Lower Oldpark)
- Shore Road / York Road
- Lower Falls
- Inner East

At the meeting Mr. Shipway on behalf of the consultancy team explained that ongoing work on the draft masterplans to capture the economic opportunities would include development of investment options, proposed street environmental works, proposed site acquisitions, early wins and longer-term aspirations. The proposals were to be included within the draft plans for further consultation with the final plans projected to be completed sometime after Easter 2009.

One of the key objectives identified for the Masterplan was to ensure that their work kick started the numerous proposals and schemes which had been identified over previous years for these five areas. The Consultants confirmed that they were aware that it would be important for the local communities that the timescale for the implementation of the Masterplans was kept as short as was practicable.

The local masterplans have in the intervening period been further revised by the Consultants and re-titled by the Department for Social Development (DSD) as "Physical Regeneration Concept Masterplans". The period of consultation closes on the 17 February 2010.

The consultation documents comprising the Overarching Document and individual Concept masterplans have been sent out under separately due to their size and format.

Key Issues

The Masterplans are being developed by DSD as part of the Renewing Communities Agenda and were intended to identify strategic action required to address areas of major dereliction. The documents were intended to “provide a vehicle to coordinate and orchestrate public sector investment and leverage in private sector investment”. The Consultants since appointment have been engaged in consultations and data identification, across all of the areas, to inform their work and provide a context to any future recommendations. As part of this process they met with representatives from a range of organisations including Council Officers and Members.

The consultancy team in the period since the previous consideration by the Committee were working to capture the economic opportunities identified. This work was understood to have been addressing development of investment options, proposed street environmental works, proposed site acquisitions, early wins and longer-term aspirations.

The Early Wins aspect of the plans appears to have been removed with the only indication of project potential being provided in the Delivery Table sections of the individual plans. The delivery also includes a notional prioritisation alongside the expected timescales, although there is no indication of the viability in terms of resources or organisational commitment.

The approach has shifted away from the facilitated delivery suggested by the previous discussion of early wins to the revised role whereby the “outline proposals set out in each of the Masterplans may be expanded and taken forward by individual organisations or agencies, and the Masterplans themselves may be used by statutory bodies in support of bids for funding”. This change in the emphasis and failure to develop a defined implementation plan or programme are significant weaknesses. The processes around the formalisation of the proposals and resources were critical elements in ensuring the expectations, raised through the long development process and consultation, were not met with under-delivery.

These concerns alongside the need for clarity around the inclusion of property within the control of the Council are detailed in a draft response appended for the consideration of Committee (Appendix 1).

The response considers the general approach of the Concept Masterplans and provides detailed commentary to supplement those provided in the form of informal comments and responses to individual consultations.

The main issues relate to the:

- shift in approach, away from the facilitated delivery suggested by the previous discussion of early wins undermines the value of the Masterplans and the consultations;
- lack of clarity around the viability in terms of resources or organisational commitment;
- absence of detailed resource consideration and the concern that raised

- expectations will be met with under-delivery;
- failure address the commercially viability of proposals; and
 - Review of Public Administration and the potential change in responsibilities for the various key partners identified in the document.

The Committee is requested to consider the appended draft as a basis for the agreement of a Council response to the Department for Social Development consultation documents.

Recommendations

Members are requested to consider the content of the proposed draft response to the Concept Masterplans, as set out in Appendix 1, and if appropriate endorse this as the formal response to the Department for Social Development.

Decision Tracking

Following Committee approval:

The finalised response to the Concept Masterplans is collated and submitted to the Department for Social Development

Timeframe: February 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley Mc Cay.

Key to Abbreviations

DSD	Department for Social Development
RPA	review of Public Administration

Documents Attached

Appendix 1	Draft response to Concept Masterplans and Overarching Document
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APPENDIX ONE

Belfast City Council Response to Physical Regeneration Concept Masterplans

Overarching Document

The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation documents both in light of existing work and the potential enhanced range of post RPA functions in the areas of Community Planning, Planning and Regeneration.

As previously highlighted through informal comments the crystallisation of the proposals into a defined implementation plan or programme are critical aspects of the plan development process. The processes around the formalisation of the proposals and resources are critical elements in ensuring the raised expectations are not met with under-delivery.

The early wins concept that formed part of the previous consultations on the plans appears to have been removed with the only indication of project potential being provided in the Delivery Table sections of the individual plans. The delivery section also includes a notional prioritisation alongside the expected timescales, although there is no indication of the viability in terms of resources or organisational commitment.

The shift in approach, away from the facilitated delivery suggested by the previous discussion of early wins undermines the value of the Masterplans and the consultations. The revised role for the Masterplans whereby they outline proposals for each of the areas that “may be expanded and taken forward by individual organisations or agencies, and the Masterplans themselves may be used by statutory bodies in support of bids for funding” would not appear to meet the expectations fostered by the consultations.

The issue of the implementation or delivery is of direct relevance to the Council in the context of the Review of Public Administration and the potential change in responsibilities for the various key drivers identified in the document. Early engagement with the Council in terms of the detailed processes of resource allocation and the potential transitional arrangements will be required to ensure the potential for “early wins” that may remain and longer terms proposals can be realistically assessed or realised.

Therefore, the Council would seek early and constructive discussions with the Department around the clarification of any short term or high priority proposals and, in particular, the short/medium term funding process to be taken forward as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review to ensure future project implementation resources.

General Comments

There remains a clear deficiency in terms of any resource commitments associated with the proposals or an indication of the proposed process for securing funding through the comprehensive spending review or equivalent processes. The implementation or delivery section suggests delivery timescales of two to ten years

(short to long) from agreement of the plans which would extend beyond the proposed trigger date for the Review of Public Administration changes. This heightens the necessity for the inclusion of a clearer implementation element to the plans that highlights the projects and areas of activity that could benefit from being developed on a shared basis.

In the absence of the detailed consideration of the implementation or the potential of the catalyst projects it would be difficult to comment on the overall viability of the proposals or the suggested prioritisation as outlined in the summary tables for the five Concept Masterplans.

The overall viability of the proposals appear to be restricted by the failure of the information within the document to adequately address the commercial viability of proposals or their ability to provide the levels of social and physical infrastructure to which the visions for the different areas aspire. The narrative does not appear to provide details on funding agreed or assessment of the public or private sector capacity to deliver the proposed schemes identified in partnership or on their own.

The Council is required to be conscious of any potential legacy that may arise from a transfer of functions such as established by these proposed Concept Masterplans. Exploration will be required into how these conceptual Masterplans could dovetail with the Council's intentions for the continued consideration of ongoing initiatives across the city and the refreshing of its own citywide Masterplan.

Whilst it is noted that the concept of Short Term projects could be those expected to be targeted for completion within two years of inception this appears unrealistic in respect of the scale of some of the projects included within this designation. The Grove Leisure Centre landmark development has no planning consent nor has the Council initiated the formal development of proposals that could form the basis of a partnership or engagement in relation to the potential expansion of the site area to incorporate additional land. Similarly the development of the Giants Park aspect of the North Foreshore with the associated physical connection to the adjacent areas are an element of a larger development linked to the potential for external grant support and income streams which may make the Medium Term designation optimistic.

The opportunity for fuller consideration of the documents through the Council Committee processes would have been useful to facilitate a more detailed response that could have sought to maximise the opportunities for the exploration of strategy alignment with Council initiatives. Whilst the document makes reference to complementarity between the plans and the parallel process for the development of the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks a more detailed comparison should be included to demonstrate this integration. It would also be useful for the document to provide clarity in respect of the role of the Concept Masterplans vis-à-vis the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks and other documents in terms of delivery.

There are some clear synergies between what is being proposed in the document and the aspirations/ priorities emerging from the continuing internal Council considerations in respect of Place Shaping Projects across the city. This work is being taken forward as part of the Council's City Investment Fund proposals. The implications in terms of land ownership and potential requests to Council to release land for redevelopment need to be set in the context of operational delivery and these citywide processes.

It should, however, be recognised that prioritisation will be a critical issue as the Key Partners such as the Council have responsibilities beyond the target areas covered by the Concept Masterplans. In terms of detailed comments a number of the earlier informal comments provided by the Council remain to be addressed. There needs to be clear recognition of examples where proposals either involve or are likely to impact upon Council facilities or land. This recognition should then translate into the articulation of the role of the Council within the “Key Partner” designation to indicate whether or not a proposal has been subject to Council consideration.

This “Key Partner” aspect of the documents needs to take cognisance of the potential impact of the RPA and clarification of the potential roles ascribed to the Council and other bodies. This clarification could usefully be introduced in the Statutory Approval and key Stakeholder section of the overarching document.

There are areas of the plan where it may be appropriate to highlight the necessity for shorter term environmental enhancements in advance of the longer term aspirations such as the Agnes St/Crumlin Rd junction where landscaping schemes have been developed to provide a shorter terms enhancement to the locality pending longer term developments.

In principle the urban design standards are welcomed and provide an opportunity for parallel processes to be integrated, however there is no evidence of social development being captured alongside the physical development and limited definition of the formal leisure opportunities outlined in the master plans. Greater detail would be useful in relation to the public realm initiatives which are generally welcomed.

In the overarching plan there is a reference to quality walking networks which are subsequently referred to in the individual plans as quality walking corridors. It is unclear whether or not the corridors are a recognised term and whether or not it relates only to its physical nature or whether other elements, for example, physical activity requirements; effective signposting; ecology/ pollution levels are considered for the term to be applied. It would be useful to define routes and stepping stones within them along the corridors.

Specific Comments

The issues and observations detailed below should be taken in the context of previous comments provided by the Council as part of the formal and internal consultations over the past three years.

Lower Shankill

- There are ongoing discussions on the land around the Hammer site and surrounding open space. The Council, as one of the landowners, welcomes an integrated approach in the development of this area in the context that the subject is currently under consideration by the Assets Management Group
- The concept of leisure facilities (p13) requires clarification or definition especially in relation to recent developments with the developer’s plans and ongoing proposals for the adjacent Gaol.

- The use/ maintenance of trees (p14) 'to define parking bays and reduce prominence of vehicles' may conflict with general crime prevention guidance to preserve clear and visible sightlines.
- The development of increased provision of tree coverage in this area and throughout the city is welcomed.

Crumlin Road (including Lower Oldpark)

- It should be noted that there is a council playground at Clifton Park Avenue and it may also include playing fields at Marrowbone.
- The lack of public space in this area and the need for greater provision could have implications for the form of development proposed.
- There is in principle support from the Parks and Leisure Department for the green link referenced in item 4.6
- The Crumlin Community Hub (p 13 & 18) provides little articulation of the proposals for the facility or the basis for the Council role as a potential Key Partner. The concept should include a reference to the library authority and include consider the implications for other Council or sector provider assets in the area.

Shore road/ York road concept master plan

- The introduction of signage (p4) to improve links to key sites is welcomed.
- Greenway (p16) – it may be useful to suggest green linkages through existing greenway including Alexandra Park and Northwood Linear Park.
- The potential development at Loughside would provide a new replacement recreational facility in the Mount Vernon area (e.g. play area/ kickabout/ MUGA)
- Stepping stones (p 8 &18) - the ongoing development of the Seaview allotments site has realised renewed archaeological interest in the old fort and may be another potential stepping stone in the area.
- A plan has been developed for Grove playing fields (p 9) although no specific resources have been assigned.
- The disposal of the Skegoneill site as suggested was also the subject of previous comment that highlighted the complications in relation to the basis for the transfer and the link to the development of the new facility.
- The Grove Leisure Centre proposals should have a clearer recognition of the role for DRD and the potential for the incorporation of current road space into a development proposal.

Lower Falls concept master plan

- Falls Leisure centre could be identified as one of the developed assets on the stepping stone map (p 8).
- Reinforce the need for complementary cluster of functions alongside in each development (p15)
- The viability of the physical relocation of the Grosvenor playing field to enhance the new Gateway proposal would be questionable in the context of public resource constraints and it may be difficult to secure support for the concept. The issues in relation to Grosvenor Playing Fields were highlighted in previous submissions in relation to ownership and the necessity for replacement facilities and open space. The Council ownership and responsibility is suggested in Key Partners table but not in the main narrative.

- The local concerns that the Lower Falls in becoming a “Gateway” to another quarter should be addressed through clear articulation of the area as existing community and destination.

Inner East concept master plan

- The cycle way forms part of the Connswater greenway
- The apex site (p 14) forms part of the Connswater pathway however the suitability of the present physical landscape to fulfil the plans detailed in the report may need further consideration.
- The need for improved Access and Movement also extends to creating improved links both with the Titanic quarter and between Short Strand and the surrounding residential areas.
- The Connswater Greenway is a major development and has the potential for transform the local environments and feeder routes alongside the appropriate redevelopment of derelict ground and/or buildings could further enhance outputs.
- In February 2009 the Parks and Leisure committee agreed the ongoing Facilities management Agreement for the Templemore Baths for a further 5 years.

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