

(Draft) Cathedral Quarter Vision and Framework for Strategic Development

[2619](#) October 2010

Creativity has come to be the most highly prized commodity in our economy—and yet it is not a “commodity.” Creativity comes from people. And while people can be hired and fired, their creative capacity cannot be bought or sold, or turned on or off at will. . . . Creativity must be motivated and nurtured in a multitude of ways, by employers, by people themselves and by the communities where they locate.

(Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life, Richard L. Florida, Basic Books, 2002)

Culture is created and sustained by people. A cultural quarter is a complex cluster of activities and people – networks embedded in a particular place. People make cultural quarters successful.

(Cultural Quarters: principles and practice, Simon Roodhouse, Bristol: Intellect Books, 2006)

The Cathedral Quarter Steering Group (CQSG)

CQSG is a unique, stakeholder-led undertaking, which brings together key local participants to take stock of progress, analyse successes and failures, and seek solutions to achieve the best outcomes for the Cathedral Quarter and the city. CQSG, which includes representation from a mix of sectors and interests, including business, leisure, the public sector, and the arts, puts into practice the principles of place-shaping by engaging local people and harnessing their expertise to develop this important resource for the city. CQSG's mission is to make the Cathedral Quarter the thriving hub of Belfast's cultural life

Since its inception, CQSG has included representatives from:

Barnabas Ventures, Mark Finlay,
Belfast Cathedral, Ken Patterson,
Belfast Circus School / Festival of Fools, Will Chamberlain,
Belfast City Council, Carolyn Mathers, Shirley McCay,
Community Arts Forum, Heather Floyd
Department for Social Development, Carol Ramsey,
Kabosh Theatre Productions
The MAC, Anne McReynolds
MCE Public Relations/Royal Exchange Ltd., Paul McErlean, CQSG Chair
The Merchant Hotel, Sorcha Wolsey,
New Belfast Community Arts Initiative, Conor Shields
Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, Rita Harkin,
University of Ulster, Kerstin Mey, Peter Walker,
Belfast City Centre Management, Andrew Irvine, (advisory)
Cathedral Quarter Development Manager, Belfast City Centre Management, Patricia Freedman,

Contents

	page
Executive Summary	5
Introduction - From There to Here	11
Vision - A Place Like No Other	15
The Cultural Heartbeat	17
A Quarter for All Reasons	21
Going Public	25
Shaping the Space	28
Appendix A – Historic Context	33
Appendix B – Policy Context	40
Appendix C – Traffic and Transport Scoping Study (RPS)	
Appendix D – Consultation	

List of Abbreviations

DRD, Department for Regional Development (DRD)
BMTP, Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (2004) and 2025 Strategy
DoE, Department of the Environment
BMAP, Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (2004)
DSD, Department for Social Development
DETI, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
NITB, Northern Ireland Tourist Board
DCAL, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)
ACNI, Arts Council of Northern Ireland
BCC, Belfast City Council
LOTS, Living Over the Shops
The MAC, Metropolitan Arts Centre
CQSG, Cathedral Quarter Steering Group

Ministerial Forward

RAFT



Executive Summary

The Cathedral Quarter Steering Group (CQSG) was formed in 2008 to analyse issues and opportunities and create a plan for the development of the Cathedral Quarter. CQSG includes a unique mix of local and government stakeholders. The group's mission is to develop the Cathedral Quarter as the thriving hub of Belfast's cultural life.

Vision for the Future

Belfast's historic Cathedral Quarter is a focal point and leading destination for culture, enterprise and learning

CQSG examined the many ways the Cathedral Quarter brings vitality to the city through creativity, innovation, enterprise and tourism. These activities combined with an historic setting and exciting new developments, provide the ingredients for a world class cultural quarter.

CQSG proposes the establishment of a Management Trust which will work in partnership with and on behalf of statutory stakeholders and the Cathedral Quarter community to manage all aspects of strategic need and implement the development plan.

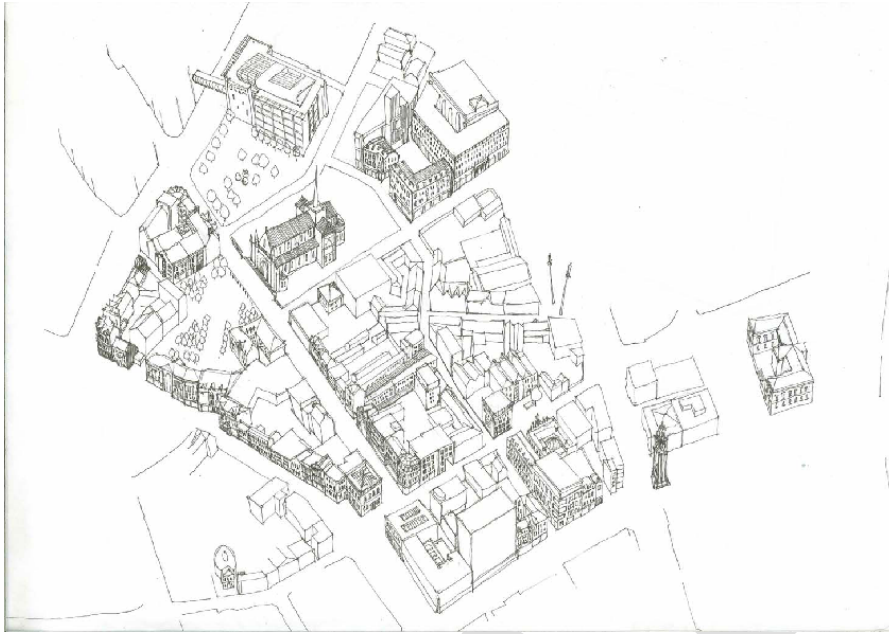
The Management Trust will:

- Provide a forum for all stakeholders to work together
- Work with disparate government agencies and departments to focus on the unique needs of the area
- Leverage funding, including external resources not available to government
- Manage the Cathedral Quarter's managed workspaces and event funding with appropriate government oversight
- Facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of services
- Implement the Cathedral Quarter Development Strategy

The Cathedral Quarter Development Plan

In guiding the future development of the Cathedral Quarter the four key priorities of the Management Trust will be:

- To support the Cathedral Quarter as a centre for the arts and creative industries
- To support the growth of the mixed-use economy in Cathedral Quarter
- To generate high levels of public participation
- To build and maintain a supportive Infrastructure



The Cultural Heartbeat

Priority 1: To support the Cathedral Quarter as a centre for the arts and creative industries

The Cathedral Quarter can become a major driver of economic, social and cultural change in the city and the region. From the creation of new artistic work to the running of a successful creative business, these activities are crucial to the knowledge economy which will foster growth in the future.

A renewed and focused commitment to creativity and excellence is needed to enable our community of artists and creative practitioners to produce outstanding work. Developing the Cathedral Quarter as Belfast's cultural hub will require public and private investment to support a full calendar of events, appropriate venues, the development of creative industries and adequate managed workspace.

Objective 1.1:

Secure long-term strategic commitment from funders and investors for the development of a full calendar of events and activities (p.18)

Key Targets include:

- DSD funding for the Laganside Events Fund in the short term
- A larger Cathedral Quarter events fund with support from multiple funders at increased levels
- The development of additional high-profile events such as Culture Night Belfast
- Distribution of funding by the Management Trust to meet the strategic priorities of the area

Objective 1.2:

Key Targets include:

Stimulate public and private investment for venues (p.18)

- Sustained operation of the Black Box as a crucial cultural venue
- Support for The MAC commensurate with the shared aspiration for a world-class home for the arts in the Cathedral Quarter.
- Civic and cultural use of the Assembly Buildings (Northern Bank)
- On-going development of the Oh Yeah Music Centre

Objective 1.3:
Promote the clustering of creative and cultural industries (p.19)

Key Targets include:

- A 15% increase in the number of creative and cultural organisations and businesses located in Cathedral Quarter
- Funding for creative industries development to include a programme of business incubation, mentoring and support
- Government recognition of the importance of creative industries in the Cathedral Quarter

Objective 1.4:
Expand and renew the Managed Workspace provision (p.20)

Key Targets include:

- New selection criteria and tenancy agreements for a sustainable balance of non-profit organisations and creative business incubation
- Full occupancy of existing buildings
- Ownership in trust of the existing Cathedral Quarter managed workspace buildings
- Purchase of additional managed workspace to meet the needs of the cultural quarter
- Long-term, effective management of the workspaces

A Quarter for all Reasons

Priority 2: To support the growth of the mixed-use economy in Cathedral Quarter

The dynamic mix of uses with cultural activity at the core sets the Cathedral Quarter apart as one of Belfast's most exciting places to work, visit and live. The interaction of diverse and sometimes competitive interests creates opportunities and challenges. Finding the balance that will enable the mix while enhancing its distinctive character will take strong management and collaborative partnerships. The key challenge will be to ensure that arts, business, education and community interests maintain a presence and have opportunities to add value.

Objective 2.1:
Attract investment (p.22)

Key Targets include:

- Capital investment for expansion of the managed workspace provision
- Incentives for independent retail and active ground-floor

use

- A presence in local and regional economic deliberations
- A high-profile economic conference in the MAC in 2012

Objective 2.2:

Balance public and private land use to meet the needs of the cultural quarter (p.22)

Key Targets include:

- Full support for the objectives of the North East Quarter Masterplan (Appendix B, p. XX)
- Zoning for the Cathedral Quarter to include requirements for active ground floor use, servicing hours, ratio of public to private and arts to non-arts use
- Cathedral Quarter (Business Improvement District) BID designation to facilitate zoning implementation
- Town Centre Living Initiative Area designation to be eligible for LOTS grants

Going Public

Priority 3: To generate high levels of public participation

The Cathedral Quarter offers a variety of opportunities to develop a greater sense of shared culture and shared space in the heart of Belfast. Our aim is to exceed the expectations of both residents and visitors for pleasant and welcoming experiences through effective management of information, appropriate marketing and pro-active engagement with local communities.

Objective 3.1:

Provide the public with news and information about the Cathedral Quarter (p.25)

Key Targets include:

- A high profile in tourism marketing
- An interactive Cathedral Quarter website
- Strong media presence featuring Cathedral Quarter organisations, events and activities

Objective 3.2:

Involve local communities community groups in Cathedral Quarter activities (p.26)

Key Targets include:

- Increased awareness of work of Cathedral Quarter organisations in local communities
- Increased community showcasing in Cathedral Quarter events
- Greater community access to activities and events

Objective 3.3:

Improve people's experience of working, visiting and living in the Cathedral Quarter (p.27)

Key Targets include:

- Active forums for discussing and resolving issues of shared concern
- Adoption of visitor servicing goals by Cathedral Quarter stakeholders

- Visitor information point(s) in the Cathedral Quarter

Objective 3.4:

Promote best practice to ensure maximum accessibility to Cathedral Quarter premises, public spaces, services and activities (p.27)

Key Targets include:

- Accessibility as a priority in all development initiatives
- Readily available accessibility information
- Raised awareness of accessibility issues specific to the Cathedral Quarter

Shaping the Space

Priority 4: To build and maintain a supportive Infrastructure

A re-purposed, modernised and well-maintained infrastructure will firmly establish the Cathedral Quarter as an inviting, sustainable and productive environment. Traffic and parking must be managed to meet the city's strategic objectives and to ensure access for everyone.

The Cathedral Quarter's built environment, including its historic buildings, squares and public spaces, narrow streets and laneways, not only add character and authenticity to many public activities, but also function as part of the working cultural quarter. The public realm must be designed and maintained to a standard consistent with its role as meeting place, venue and historic cultural space.

Objective 4.1:

Ensure a clean, safe and well-functioning public realm through effective local management (p.28)

Key Targets include:

- Reduced crime and vandalism and greater safety
- Improved procedures for:
 - policing, security and dealing with anti-social behaviour
 - street cleansing and rubbish collection
 - maintenance of lighting, signage, street furniture and underground services
- Servicing policy for goods delivery vehicles
- Traffic regulation order to manage vehicular access

Objective 4.2:

Develop and enhance public space and streetscapes (p.29)

Key Targets include:

- Distinctive signage, street lighting and street furniture to reinforce the identity of the area
- Information points and other public amenities
- Recognisable gateways to the Cathedral Quarter
- A streetscape plan for Donegall Street
- Appropriate public space to enhance the Cathedral setting and the new Belfast Campus of the University of Ulster, and

- the Four Corners
- A programme of seasonal enhancements

Objective 4.3:
Improve access for pedestrians and cyclists and calm the traffic (p.30)

Key Targets include:

- The introduction of controlled junctions at major pedestrian and cycle access points
- Installation of cycling lanes and bike racks
- The introduction of a right turn from Talbot Street to Dunbar Link
- Designation of adequate taxi stands and tour bus parking
- The re-routing of long-range commuter buses and through traffic from Donegall Street to Dunbar Link
- The redevelopment of Dunbar Link as a 'boulevard' in line with BMAP

Objective 4.4:
Improve access by public transport (p.31)

Key Targets include:

- Cathedral Quarter / University of Ulster train station at Gamble Street
- Re-instatement of the Centrelink Shuttle Bus between Glengall Street and Laganside Bus Stations

Objective 4.5:
Implement best practice in heritage-led regeneration (p.32)

Key Targets include:

- Increased public awareness and celebration of the area's historic buildings and streetscapes
- Creative re-use of historic buildings
- "Living Over the Shops" in the empty upper floors of historic buildings
- High quality new developments where the opportunity exists, which respect the existing form and scale

Conclusion

Political will and joint efforts in the face of intense economic and political pressure will be required to deliver the strategic benefits that the Cathedral Quarter can bring to the city. These efforts need to be underpinned by a strong belief in the importance of culture to our quality of life and the contribution of creative and cultural activity to our economy.

Only dedicated local management can sustain the momentum of Cathedral Quarter development over the next five years. A Cathedral Quarter Management Trust will bring a focused approach to Cathedral Quarter development. It will have access to opportunities and

resources not available to government. And as a presence in Cathedral Quarter it will have particular opportunities to strengthen relationships and promote new ways of working. CQSG is mindful of the complexity of establishing a Management Trust and proposes to work towards this goal in step with key stakeholders.

Introduction - From There to Here

In cities around the world cultural quarters are sources of shared identity, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. They serve as the focal point for civic and cultural life and a destination for visitors. The benefits to tourism and economic development can be seen in cities such as Leeds, Dublin, St. Louis, Brooklyn Leipzig and many others where the cultural quarter throbs as the beating heart of the new “smart city”.

The idea of developing the oldest part of Belfast as a cultural quarter has been around since at least the 1970’s. At the height of the Troubles a few visionary thinkers within the arts, community, business and government sectors recognised the area’s potential and began putting the building blocks in place. Northside, as it was called back then, had history and hidden charm but was characterised by derelict warehouses, dilapidated buildings and deserted streets.

The transformation has not happened overnight. From the late 1980’s, a playwright, a chef and an architect, who believed passionately in the potential of the area, persuaded others to share that belief. Momentum gathered slowly, spurred on by regeneration along the river. In 1997 the Laganside Corporation adopted part of Northside as a strategic link to the city centre and, with the stroke of a pen, the Cathedral Quarter was born.

A period of focused activity and close management followed, which included the creation of managed workspaces for artists and small creative businesses, extensive streetscape work and the development of public space. Culture and leisure were the economic drivers supported at times by infusions of public funds followed by private investment.

Cathedral Quarter Today

The Cathedral Quarter in 2010 is a very different place. From the barren wasteland of the mid ‘90s, it now offers cultural and leisure activity on a whole new scale for Belfast. Publicly-funded projects such as the managed workspaces, festivals and events have served as catalysts for private investment such as the opening of new restaurants and cafes, and major new developments such as Saint Anne’s Square and the development of The Merchant Hotel and its current expansion. The start of construction on The MAC at the end of 2009 secured the arts centre project. The Cathedral Quarter can finally look ahead to serving the city as its cultural hub.

Today, choices for a visit range from performances and exhibitions to fine dining all within a five minute walk. Thousands of visitors attend festivals, eat out, go for a pint or spend the weekend in one of Cathedral Quarter's hotels. Approximately 50,000 tourists call in each year to the Belfast Cathedral (St. Anne's Cathedral) which gives the area its name. Many continue their exploration through the city's oldest streets, taking in the historic character and buildings. Or they discover the area through tours and initiatives such as Summer Sundays, Late Night Art, Music Tours, and the Christian Heritage Trail.

The Cathedral Quarter comes alive through the work of artists and creative people from across the city and around the world during festivals and special events such as the award winning Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, Open House Festival, Festival of Fools, Belfast Film Festival, the Out To Lunch Festival and Culture Night. The University of Ulster, Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast Circus School and others offer opportunities for hands-on learning and creating.

This only scratches the surface of what you can find today in Cathedral Quarter. With culture at the core, Cathedral Quarter has become one of the most distinctive and diverse mixed use areas in the city and is home to over a dozen established and emerging creative businesses, more than 50 arts organisations ranging from leading theatre companies to community filmmakers and a youth orchestra, and state of the art office facilities.

The Potential

The same passionate belief which gave rise to the Cathedral Quarter is driving further progress. New arrivals and public and private investment continue to materialise in the conviction that the cultural quarter's attractiveness, vitality and spirit represent the city's future and make it an excellent place to do business. There is increasing interest in the Cathedral Quarter's potential as a leading visitor destination and a magnet for major national and international events.

Enthusiasm for continued development comes from arts, business, leisure, public sector and other stakeholders. DSD has continued the Laganside Events Fund and, as the lead agency for regeneration of the city-centre, is pursuing retail-led regeneration through the North East Quarter Masterplan and DSD's adoption of the Royal Exchange development plan. Belfast City Council has been actively developing the area as a cultural tourism destination, and the Arts Council (ACNI) and DCAL are making a significant investment in cultural infrastructure through the building of The MAC.

A Work in Progress

However, there is still a long way to go. The overlapping and sometimes conflicting remits and strategies of various government departments and agencies undermine the efficiency of services and initiatives, and cause confusion and uncertainty.

The Cathedral Quarter does not yet have the critical mass of footfall and activity needed to offer a consistent visitor experience. Unlucky timing can leave tourists wandering aimlessly

through deserted streets wondering what all the fuss is about. Active use of ground floor spaces, including residential and retail, and more cultural programming are needed to contribute to the area's vibrancy.

Some historic buildings have been restored and given 21st century roles, but many others are at risk of demolition or lie vacant and derelict. There is also an urgent requirement for better management of the overlapping servicing needs of the daytime and evening economies.

And the Cathedral Quarter is vulnerable to the most common criticism of cultural quarters – short-sightedness in allowing their creative people to be pushed out as the area becomes more popular and rents start to go up.

Approximately half of the creative and cultural organisations and businesses which contribute to the area's vibrancy, including The Black Box, dance and theatre companies, galleries, festivals and small creative businesses, are dependent on commercial space which could quickly go beyond the reach of arts organisations if owners raise rents or decide to develop their properties for other uses.

One of the biggest challenges over the next five years will be to sustain vital cultural resources such as the Black Box, in the context of fully supporting The MAC as it establishes itself. The Cathedral Quarter will require accessible and affordable space for everything from gigs to artistic experimentation to world-class performances and exhibitions to develop its characteristic variety of cultural activity and offerings for everyone.

Time for Action

In the current economic climate it is critically important to uphold stakeholder and investor confidence and concentrate decision making on the Cathedral Quarter's prospects for making significant contributions to the economy.

Future development must take greater account of the economic, social and environmental influences that have shaped the area's character. We need to develop a better understanding of how the area functions, aspects that are stable, those that will change, and those that need to be managed and nurtured. Maintaining an appropriate balance between public and private use of the space will be vital to its identity and future success.

When Laganside wound down its operation in 2007, responsibility for the completion of key projects, the management of assets and event funding reverted to DSD with plans for a future handover of the assets to Belfast City Council at some time in the future under RPA (Appendix B). Within the Quarter there was a feeling that the focus was drifting due to uncertainty about management and decision-making during the transition. Local organisations and individuals, together with MP for the area Nigel Dodds, approached the Minister for the DSD to propose the establishment of a steering group to ensure that the Cathedral Quarter would continue to develop to its full potential.

The Cathedral Quarter Steering Group (CQSG) was established in 2008 with funding from DSD and input from a committed core of local stakeholders, Belfast City Council and Belfast City Centre Management. The group was charged with developing a 5-Year Strategic Vision and Development Plan for the area. The Plan builds on the physical regeneration work carried out by Laganside Corporation and the Department for Social development (DSD), and the on-going efforts of the Cathedral Quarter community.

CQSG has been bringing together local stakeholders to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the area and the best ways to maintain momentum and promote long-term growth. The next critical step is to establish a Management Trust with the capacity to deliver the Plan

Dedicated area management is consistent with Laganside's Cathedral Quarter Regeneration Strategy (1998) and the Cathedral Quarter Interim Review (2002), and the subsequent Position Statement (2003) prepared for DSD by DTZ Piedad Consulting. It has also been a principle theme in stakeholder consultations held in the Cathedral Quarter from 2008 to 2010 in preparation of this Plan.

The proposed trust will be structured to enable broad participation from statutory and local stakeholders. It will require a base in the Cathedral Quarter and the capacity to: represent Cathedral Quarter interests; engage the Cathedral Quarter community, investors and the public; manage Cathedral Quarter workspace properties and other assets; and develop new programmes, events and initiatives. Once in place, progress can begin towards the priorities outlined in this Plan.

Excellent working models exist in other cities for cultural quarter and cluster management. Initiatives such as Dublin's Temple Bar, Sheffield's Creative Industries Quarter, Manchester's Northern Quarter and many others will provide templates and invaluable lessons as we work in partnership with DSD and BCC, ACNI, DETI and others to create the strongest management structure for the Cathedral Quarter.

The implementation of this strategy is essential to securing the cultural future of the Cathedral Quarter. A thriving cultural quarter in the city centre, which is a shared place for all its citizens while at the same time providing a unique and exceptional cultural experiences is no less than Belfast deserves. And it is within our reach if we recognise what the Cathedral Quarter has to offer and make it a priority.

Vision – A Place Like No Other – Unlike Any Other Place

To Make the Cathedral Quarter Belfast's Thriving Cultural Hub

The Cathedral Quarter is often cited as an example of Belfast's renewed vitality and magnetism. As such it has the potential to deliver a distinctive and potent model of urban regeneration for others to follow. Its laneways and narrow streets, architecturally significant buildings, public spaces and venues set the stage. Artists and cultural organisations animate the space. Behind the scenes, extraordinary partnerships are at work linking business, government and local communities through the medium of creativity.

Vision

Belfast's historic Cathedral Quarter is a focal point and leading destination for culture, enterprise and learning

Picture This

Looking ahead we see a pulsating and unique cultural quarter, where commerce and creativity, tourism and day-to-day living comfortably co-exist. With the ancient core preserved and the Cathedral sitting proudly in landscaped grounds at its centre, the Cathedral Quarter of the future presents an irresistible blend of people and place.

By day, reconfigured streetscapes, full of interesting public art, draw shoppers, business people, tourists and residents through streets that buzz with energy. The boldly-designed arts centre is hosting a major exhibition in its gallery space, while a few steps further up the street, commuters make their way from the local train halt, through throngs of students on their way to class at the university. Tour buses park in discreet bays and visitors are directed by finely-crafted street signs pointing out an array of attractions. Delegates chat before heading into one of the local hotels for their national conference. Parents collect their children from dance and theatre workshops and steer pushchairs back towards the underground parking to unload their bags of shopping before heading to one of the cafes for lunch. Music from a concert drifts through the air.

By evening, shoppers in the boutiques make their last purchases as residents return to their apartments above. Outside, whilst some are heading in to performances, others are parking their bikes and deciding where to grab a bite, watching an outdoor event or browsing the shop fronts. In restaurants and bars the art work changes weekly thanks to collaborations the various arts and cultural organisations in the area – over 120 of them at last count.

And later still lorries slip down into the underground loading area, ready to restock the stores before morning, when it starts all over again.

This can become the reality for Cathedral Quarter. The elements are already in place. Over the next 5 years we see the Cathedral Quarter thriving economically, culturally and socially, known worldwide as an excellent and authentic cultural quarter that reflects the depth of Belfast's past and points to a hopeful future inspired by innovation and creativity.

Ethos

The Cathedral Quarter contributes significantly and measurably to the economic, social and environmental well-being of its stakeholders, citizens, residents and visitors. The Cathedral Quarter upholds a sustainable balance between commercial and cultural, private and public interests.

Development Principles

Three crucial inter-related aspects – the 'triple bottom line of sustainability' serve as the guiding principles which underpin this strategy:

Economic sustainability: building and nurturing a dynamic local economy clustered around specialised creative and cultural enterprises and promoting the development of innovation, skills and knowledge.

Social sustainability: building community cohesion, civic engagement and a celebration of diverse identities; promoting a sense of belonging and connectedness and reducing social alienation and exclusion in our city through participation in cultural life.

Environmental sustainability: promoting sustainable and human-scale forms of development; respecting global inter-dependence; promoting green forms of transport; reducing waste and energy use; preserving the historic nature of the area; re-using buildings.

The Cultural Heartbeat

Priority 1: To support the Cathedral Quarter as a centre for the arts and creative industries

Creative and cultural industries have been identified as a leading growth sector for Northern Ireland and the UK, with the potential to contribute new ideas, products and ways of working to the local and regional economy and offer opportunities for new jobs and skills training. Since 1997 the Cathedral Quarter has developed as both a cultural quarter for tourism, and a real engine of creative production.

[Creative & Cultural Use Map]

The Cathedral Quarter is currently home to over 60 creative and cultural entities (see Appendix XX). The creative and cultural cluster includes SME's (small and medium-sized enterprises) covering film & digital media, photography, graphic design and architecture, and a host of creative and cultural organisations ranging from history and heritage to community arts. Organisations include theatre companies, festivals, galleries and exhibitions, small museums, dance studios, community television, and artists' workshops.

Venue-based organisations such as the Black Box, the Oh Yeah Music Centre and Belfast Circus School bring thousands to Cathedral Quarter for performances and festival events. Oh Yeah, Circus School, Northern Visions, Belfast Exposed, the Belfast Print Workshop and others offer opportunities for skills development and life-long learning. The University of Ulster's Belfast Campus has been named a 'creative industries hotspot.'

Many of these businesses and organisations work together, share resources and skills, and offer opportunities for employment, mentoring, and life-long learning. The University of Ulster increasingly engages with the Cathedral Quarter as an extended campus and incubator for projects, innovative collaborations and work experience.

The Cathedral Quarter's five public squares include over 5000 m² of public space. Much of it is equipped with power and lighting and can double as outdoor venue space for cultural events. Custom House Square is Belfast's largest outdoor venue. Cotton Court, Writer's Square, Cathedral Gardens (or Buoy's Park) and the recently launched Saint Anne's Square provide more intimate outdoor space.

The use of its outdoor public spaces and indoor venues, as well as historic churches, hotels, pubs and restaurants for events during festivals and peak periods, transforms the Cathedral Quarter into a magical place of inspiration and memorable experiences. The streets and laneways connecting the public spaces themselves serve as venues for processions, parades and street theatre during festivals, such as the Festival of Fools.

Public art, whether permanent, temporary, commissioned or community-generated, creates a focal point and sets the tone throughout.

No other area of the city serves as such a focal point for cultural activity. Its city-centre location makes it an important shared space, accessible to and from all communities and creates opportunities to function as a hub. The opening of The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) in 2012 will further reinforce this role and introduce the Cathedral Quarter to new audiences.

The MAC

Planned in 1997 as a key initiative to anchor the cultural quarter, The MAC, is under construction adjacent to Saint Anne's Square. At £17.5ml it is one of the largest public sector cultural investments in Northern Ireland. The MAC will include two theatres, three visual art galleries, a dance studio, education, workshop and rehearsal spaces, offices as well as a residency space for artists and a café and bar.

The MAC is planning a world-class programme ranging from blockbuster events and exhibitions to experimental new works. Across all its spaces The MAC will showcase the best in local, arts and culture as well as bringing internationally renowned work to Belfast. The projected total for audiences and visitors is 177,000 per year.

However, projected funding levels for arts and culture - already considerably lower in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK or the Republic of Ireland - are expected to decrease will decrease in the current economic climate. The Cathedral Quarter has demonstrated its potential but has not yet achieved the level and variety of creative and cultural spaces and activity needed to sustain either a consistent tourism offering or a creative and cultural cluster.

Detailed analysis is needed to develop accurate planning and marketing which will leverage the economic benefits of cultural and creative activity and promote investment opportunities.

Objective 1.1: Secure long-term strategic commitment from funders and investors for the development of a full calendar of events and activities

Key Targets to include:

- DSD funding for the Laganside Events Fund in the short term
- A larger Cathedral Quarter events fund with support from multiple funders at increased levels
- The development of additional high-profile events such as Culture Night

Steps

- Identify opportunities for cultural investment in the Quarter
- Detail the benefits of cultural activities
- Develop sponsorships and funding opportunities for events and activities
- Establish an accountable framework for distributing funds

Belfast

→ Contribute significantly to the growth of the city's cultural tourism offering

Objective 1.2: Stimulate public and private investment for venues

Key Targets to include:

- Sustained operation of the Black Box as a crucial cultural venue
- Support for The MAC commensurate with the shared aspiration for a world-class home for the arts in the Cathedral Quarter.
- Civic and cultural use of the Assembly Buildings
- On-going development of the Oh Yeah Music Centre

Steps

- Promote the sustainability and development of both existing and new venues
- Lobby government and the public on behalf of existing and new venues
- Contribute to feasibility studies, economic appraisals, consultations and research

A Dynamic Cluster

Artists and entrepreneurs are drawn to the Cathedral Quarter by the proximity to other artists, access to venues and creative services and opportunities to share ideas and resources. Their sustainability in the area depends on the availability of affordable, flexible spaces, a supportive environment for innovation and creativity and real opportunities to produce and present work.

Much more can be done to develop the cluster in the Cathedral Quarter through the managed workspaces, the university and other means. Opportunities available through DETI and other agencies are not being taken up.

Objective 1.3: Promote the clustering of creative and cultural industries

Key Targets to include:

- A 15% increase in the number of creative and cultural organisations and businesses located in Cathedral Quarter
- Funding for creative industries development to include a programme of business incubation, mentoring and support
- Government recognition of the importance of creative industries in the Cathedral Quarter

Steps

- Raise the profile of creative and cultural industries in the Cathedral Quarter
- Support existing and attract new creative businesses, cultural organisations and artists
- Encourage networking and the sharing of ideas
- Encourage cultural stakeholders in the area to contribute to Cathedral Quarter development
- Work with DETI and the University of Ulster

- Develop a skills database
- Coordinate a series of consultation, mentoring and networking workshops
- Develop, coordinate and facilitate a mentoring package for new businesses and organisations

Affordable Space

Approximately half of the creative and cultural organisations and businesses in the Cathedral Quarter, including The Black Box, galleries, dance and theatre companies, festivals and small creative businesses, rent space at or below market rates from private landlords. This space could quickly disappear, pushing many organisations, SME's, artists and entrepreneurs out, if owners raise rents beyond affordable levels or decide to develop their properties for other uses.

The Cathedral Quarter's three managed workspaces, the Cotton Court building on Waring Street, Exchange Place on Donegall Street and The Cathedral Quarter Managed Workspace on Royal Avenue offers up to 27 units incorporating approximately 3,120m² for creative and cultural use. The Clanmil Housing Association offers another nine units in the Clanmil Arts & Business Centre on Bridge Street.

DSD is currently conducting a review of its managed workspace buildings to look at costs, tenant criteria, management and terms of lease. It is generally agreed that their management, which has been handled for the past 10 years by commercial property companies, has not fully served the interests of the cultural quarter.

The managed workspaces are a significant asset and resource within the Cathedral Quarter. Their success must be measured by their ability to create real opportunities for cultural development rather than by rental income. The review is looking at successful workplace models in other cities and changes are anticipated to re-align the workspace provision .

Objective 1.4: Expand and renew the Managed Workspace provision

Key Targets to include:

- New selection criteria and tenancy agreements for a sustainable balance of non-profit organisations and creative business incubation
- Full occupancy of existing buildings
- Ownership in trust of the existing Cathedral Quarter managed workspace

Steps

- Play a leading role in establishing and developing a Managed Workspace Steering Group
- Develop organisational capacity to own and manage the workspace buildings
- Identify potential sites for additional workspace and promote their

buildings

- Purchase of additional managed workspace to meet the needs of the cultural quarter
- Long-term, effective management of the workspaces

acquisition OR Acquire additional workspace

- Raise the profile of the managed workspace initiative as the cornerstone of the cultural quarter
- Develop a branding and communication strategy for the managed workspaces

DRAFT

A Quarter For All Reasons

Priority 2: To support balanced growth of the mixed-use economy in Cathedral Quarter

The Cathedral Quarter's variety and mix of activity extends beyond cultural production and performance to hospitality, leisure, offices, and some housing and retail. Twenty restaurants, cafes, pubs and clubs, and three new hotels opened since 2006, form the basis for the daytime and evening economy.

Mixed-Use Developments

Opened in 2008, the mixed-use development on Talbot Street between Donegall Street and Hill Street, restored a 19th Century listed textiles warehouse and developed three additional buildings in a contemporary 'warehouse' architectural style. The scheme includes 33 Social housing units, the NI War Memorial and Homefront Exhibition, two restaurants, the President's Club, and offices for a number of other organisations and businesses.

[\[Land-Use Map\]](#)

[\[Daytime, Evening and Weekend Use Maps\]](#)

Saint Anne's Square at Talbot Street and Edward Street, opened in 2009, includes 103 apartments and the 169-room Ramada Encore hotel. When fully occupied it will include 2800m² of bar and restaurant space and 1800m² of office space on the first two floors. The focal point of the development is a 1300m² square - a new public space which has already been embraced as an outdoor venue for performing arts and events.

The proposed Royal Exchange development, the largest regeneration scheme under development in Ireland at over 82,000 m² covering 12 acres, is intended to bring commercial growth to the city-centre and the Cathedral Quarter. Royal Exchange includes 39,000m² of retail and leisure space, 8,600m² of office space, 930m² for arts and cultural use, 240 apartments and over 700 underground car park spaces. Based on open-street patterns, Royal Exchange aims to meet the North East Quarter Masterplan objectives of improving linkages with the river and the city-centre, and respecting the built fabric and character of the Cathedral Quarter.

[\[Royal Exchange Map\]](#), [Artist's Impression of Garfield Street](#)

The private sector expansion of the Merchant Hotel and accompanying proposed improvements will transform Skipper Street as a gateway into the Cathedral Quarter.

[\[Artist's Impression of Skipper Street\]](#)

The University of Ulster's plan to build facilities for an additional 10,000 students at its York Street campus will bring the total number of students to over 12,000 by 2013. This large student population – a feature of successful cities around the world – is expected to bring vitality, growth, and learning opportunities to the area and stimulate demand for improved public transport, public space, accommodation and amenities.

More People Living in the Cathedral Quarter

Changes in lifestyles with an emphasis on health and well-being are focusing attention on the benefits of living in the city-centre. Greater density and more intense mix of uses produce efficiencies by concentrating services, reducing dependence on private cars and encouraging walking and cycling.

Recent residential development, including new construction at Saint Anne's Square, Talbot Street and Custom House Square and loft conversions in an old warehouse on Donegall Street, are beginning to contribute to 24-hour use of the area. Once fully-occupied, these developments will bring the number of residences to over 200, and Royal Exchange, when complete, will add another 200 or more.

Objective 2.1: Attract investment

Bringing It All Together - Mix of Uses and Vitality

Richly textured environments which, like the Cathedral Quarter, have visible mixes of function and activity at ground level, make cities attractive. The Cathedral Quarter's continued and growing reputation as a lively cultural quarter and a thriving business and leisure environment is key to attracting further investment.

Key Targets to include:

- Capital investment for expansion of the managed workspace provision
- Incentives for independent retail and active ground-floor use
- A presence in local and regional economic deliberations
- A high-profile economic conference in the MAC in 2012

Steps:

- Champion the cross-cutting contributions the Cathedral Quarter makes to the city and region
- Represent Cathedral Quarter in local, regional and national debates
- Showcase Cathedral Quarter in local and international conferences and events
- Market Cathedral Quarter to potential public and private investors
- Create a strong investment profile

Objective 2.2: Balance public and private land use to meet the needs of the cultural quarter

A seminal study of mixed-use development in towns and cities across the UK, (ODPM 2002) identified local commitment to managing and enabling the mix of uses and activities over time as more important in achieving a vibrant environment than the development of mixed-use schemes on individual sites.

The success of the Cathedral Quarter will depend on dedicated management of its unique mix-use community, and the development of strong working relationships amongst local stakeholders based on an enlightened understanding of mutual benefits. Some of the issues are already known and we can anticipate others.

- Not all regeneration in the area made active ground-floor use a priority. Consequently, extended stretches of Hill Street and Gordon Street are inactive during both the day and evening hours. Active ground-floor use is a key objective of the North East Quarter Masterplan, but there is no policy in place as yet to cover all of the Cathedral Quarter. This needs to be addressed retroactively and for future development through incentives and zoning.
- The Cathedral Quarter has unique servicing needs due to its active day and evening economies, which require coordination between city and government departments. Residents and late-night businesses have to accommodate one another.
- The influx of 12,000 students to the Belfast Campus and the potential for tension between students and other stakeholders will require planning and management.
- The expected orientation of the Royal Exchange scheme toward the main shopping thoroughfares of Royal Avenue and Cornmarket risks turning Donegall Street into a back door and a busy goods delivery route and a service yard. The scale of the development could overwhelm the Cathedral Quarter during construction and undermine its existing vibrant network of small-scale enterprises.
- Proposals to develop all of Royal Exchange at one time, and the protracted timescale for planning decisions and start construction leaves dilapidated areas of North Street, Garfield Street and Donegall Street in limbo. Listed buildings such as the North Street Arcade, the Assembly Rooms, and buildings on Garfield Street, will remain derelict for years to come and at risk of further deterioration unless an interim plan can be agreed.
- The impact of the current global economic downturn is being felt in the Cathedral Quarter as elsewhere. Reduced revenue and funding is affecting the plans of businesses and organisations, leaving businesses and the creative and culture core of activity particularly vulnerable.

Key Targets to include:

- Full support for the objectives of the North East Quarter Masterplan (Appendix B p. XX)
- Zoning for the Cathedral Quarter to include requirements for active ground floor use, servicing hours, ratio of public to private and arts to non-arts use
- A Cathedral Quarter BID designation (Business Improvement District) to facilitate zoning implementation

Steps:

- Identify and support a balance of:
 - Distinctive daytime and evening activity including arts and culture, independent retail, hospitality and tourism
 - Residential
 - Re-use of existing buildings
 - Complementary new development
 - Pedestrian and cyclist access
- Partner with government on planning, large-scale development and marketing initiatives
- Engage with the developers of Royal Exchange
- Establish a project board to include government and local stakeholders to draft zoning proposal

Going Public

Priority 3: To generate high levels of public participation

Gateway to Civic Engagement and Tourism

A growing number of people are choosing the Cathedral Quarter as a favourite destination, whether to live and work, for coffee, a night out or a weekend visit. Its city-centre location makes it an ideal place to start exploring local history and culture.

[[Social Inclusion Map](#)], [[Educational Map](#)]

As a shared city centre space, the Cathedral Quarter offers numerous opportunities to participate in civic and cultural life. It provides young people in particular with the means to explore and discover their creative potential. The creative, technical, performance, production and organisational elements of cultural activities enable people from a wide range of backgrounds to learn new skills for personal or professional development, build self-confidence and develop supportive relationships. Participation in city centre activities can help marginalized communities and individuals feel connected and included.

Welcoming Visitors

All visitors, whether local, national or international, anticipate an enjoyable and memorable experience. They need information about where to go and what to do, and clear and attractive signage to direct them. They require pleasant places in which to walk and sit down, access to refreshments, food, services, and toilets.

Objective 3.1: Provide the public with news and information about the Cathedral Quarter

We do not yet have a way of calculating the total number of visitors to the area, but we are working on a model to capture data so we can plan accordingly and ensure that visitor's needs and expectations are met.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and BCC have identified gaps in the range of activities available to tourists, and are supporting additional festivals, tours and markets, particularly on Sundays when other options may not be available. The Cathedral Quarter participates fully in these initiatives and is piloting a number of projects.

At present, marketing of events and activities and of the Cathedral Quarter as a whole is fragmented and information is difficult to find. Organisations must navigate a bewildering array of marketing campaigns and publications to reach new audiences.

Key Targets to include:

- A high profile in tourism marketing

Steps

→ Launch and maintain the Cathedral

- An interactive Cathedral Quarter website
- Strong media presence featuring Cathedral Quarter organisations, events and activities

- Quarter website with links to information and tourism outlets and appropriate social networking sites
- Contribute to research on tourism and visitor participation and promote consistency in data collection and evaluation amongst the Cathedral Quarter businesses and organisations
 - Develop a marketing plan for the Cathedral Quarter
 - Liaise with BCC, NITB, BVCB and others on tourism strategies and initiatives

Objective 3.2: Involve local community groups in Cathedral Quarter activities

Many people are more comfortable participating in activities in their local communities than in the city centre. Culture is still regarded as elitist by some.

A number of leading community and community arts organisations are based in Cathedral Quarter such as Northern Visions, New Belfast Community Arts Initiative, Community Arts Forum, and Opportunity Youth. These organisations work in diverse communities across Belfast and the region to deliver services and advance social well-being through a wide variety of programmes. This creative and cultural engagement builds ties between local communities and the city centre and can contribute to a sense of civic pride and identity.

Key Targets to include:

- Increased awareness of work of Cathedral Quarter organisations in local communities
- Increased community showcasing in Cathedral Quarter events
- Greater community access to activities and events

Steps

- Provide promotional support to organisations based in the Cathedral Quarter to raise the profile of their work in communities
- Encourage community and community arts organisations to include a Cathedral Quarter component in projects and initiatives
- Encourage venues and festivals to give community groups opportunities to perform.
- Partner with communities on joint initiatives and projects such as Culture Night
- Partner with Translink, DSD and others

to offer community transportation to activities and events

Objective 3.3: Improve people's experience of working, visiting and living in the Cathedral Quarter

Key Targets to include:

- Active forums for discussing and resolving issues of shared concern
- Adoption of visitor servicing goals (agreements?) by Cathedral Quarter stakeholders
- Visitor information point(s) in the Cathedral Quarter

Steps

- Facilitate regular Cathedral Quarter Focus Groups and keep public sector bodies informed of issues that arise
- Liaise with relevant agencies on visitor servicing initiatives
- Facilitate public participation in the decision-making processes for Cathedral Quarter development

Objective 3.4: Promote best practice to ensure maximum accessibility to Cathedral Quarter premises, public spaces, services and activities

Key Targets to include:

- Accessibility as a priority in all development initiatives
- Readily available accessibility information
- Raise awareness of accessibility issues specific to the Cathedral Quarter

Steps:

- Conduct an accessibility audit of streets, public spaces and buildings in partnership with Adapt NI and others and develop guidelines
- Propose improvements to existing problems with public space and historic buildings

Shaping the Space

Priority 4: To build and maintain a supportive Infrastructure

Historic buildings and streetscapes

Original street patterns and historic buildings invite us to experience the intimate scale of 18th and 19th century Belfast. The Cathedral Quarter incorporates over 25 listed buildings and facades, including the city's oldest civic building - the Assembly Rooms or Northern Bank Building at the Four Corners at Bridge Street and Waring Street - the commercial and civic heart of the old city and the point from which all distances were measured (Appendix A). Other historically significant buildings line the streets recalling important periods in Belfast's development as a centre for trade and commerce.

[\[Listed Buildings & Historic Streetscapes Map\]](#)

A Pedestrian and Cycle-Friendly Environment

Cathedral Quarter's narrow streets lend themselves to exploration on foot and bicycle and are not suited to through traffic. 'Ease of movement,' as described in BMAP, means that 'development should be well-connected, accessible and put the needs of pedestrians over those of vehicular traffic.'

The Cathedral Quarter's role as a key link to the city centre will grow as major development proposals move forward. Royal Exchange, the expansion of the University of Ulster, City Quays and Clarendon, the new Rapid Transit System and the re-development of the York Street interchange on the M1 will change the way we navigate the city. Our challenge is to maintain and enhance the character and intimacy of the Cathedral Quarter while improving accessibility, way-finding, safety and enjoyment.

Objective 4.1: Ensure a clean, safe and well-functioning public realm through effective local management

Clean and Safe

People and activity at street level - the same factors which deliver 'attractiveness,' are also the greatest deterrents to crime and vandalism. A well-managed public realm with well-designed and maintained lighting enhances the perception of safety and encourages greater appreciation of the Cathedral Quarter's historic and cultural buildings, spaces and activities.

Maintenance of the public realm such as timely collection of bins and regular cleansing and upkeep of streets, footpaths and other surfaces must be coordinated to meet the needs of weekday, weekend and evening economic activity. Lighting must be maintained throughout the area to a standard that safeguards and enhances public safety. The additional lighting and

electrical systems provided in the public spaces must also be maintained to meet the needs and expectations of a range of high profile events.

Key Targets to include:

- Reduced crime and vandalism and greater safety
- Improved procedures for
 - policing, security and dealing with anti-social behaviour
 - street cleansing and rubbish collection
 - maintenance of lighting, signage, street furniture and underground services
- Servicing policy for goods delivery vehicles
- Traffic regulation order to manage vehicular access

Steps:

- Convene Cathedral Quarter focus groups including the Vintners' Group and residents' forum
- Alert Cathedral Quarter stakeholders to impending infrastructure initiatives
- Facilitate communication between Cathedral Quarter stakeholders and relevant agencies to ensure day-to-day attention to the area's needs
- Explore options for increased patrolling, surveillance and lighting

Objective 4.2: Develop and enhance public space and streetscapes

A Setting for the Cathedral

Cathedral Park (or Buoy's Park), Writer's Square and the car park surrounding the Cathedral together should form an impressive setting for the Cathedral and provide links between Saint Anne's Square, The MAC, the Belfast Campus and other parts of the Cathedral Quarter. This last great opportunity for significant public space in the city centre has been identified in the current Public Realm Masterplan for Belfast. However fractured ownership and control of the three sites, financial considerations and competing interests from developers, put the prospect at risk. Creative thinking and leadership are called for to balance interests and find solutions.

[Map of proposed public spaces with pedestrian linkages]

The Four Corners and Donegall Street

The unusual width of Bridge Street offers an opportunity to re-create public space at the Four Corners, the heart of the old city, and provide an attractive gateway to the Cathedral Quarter from Cornmarket, Castle Junction and High Street. Sensitive development of Donegall Street will re-forge a grand avenue from the Four Corners to the Cathedral and on to St. Patrick's Church and Clifton House. A series of smaller public spaces proposed as part of the Royal Exchange development will potentially provide inviting pedestrian links to Royal Avenue.

Key Targets to include:

- Distinctive signage, street lighting and

Steps:

- Coordinate public consultation on

street furniture to reinforce the identity of the area

- Information points and other public amenities
- Recognisable gateways to the Cathedral Quarter
- A streetscape plan for Donegall Street
- Appropriate public space to enhance the Cathedral setting and the new Belfast Campus of the University of Ulster, and the Four Corners
- A programme of seasonal enhancements

infrastructure improvements and public art

- Organise design workshops to develop a proposal for signage, lighting and street furniture
- Propose locations for information points and public amenities
- Develop plans to restore Donegall Street as the historic spine of the old city linking the Cathedral (St. Anne's) and the Four Corners
- Engage with government and appropriate stakeholders to design integrated and coordinated public space:
 - around the Cathedral, including Buoy's Park, Writer's Square, and the Cathedral precincts;
 - at Bridge Street and the Four Corners
 - throughout the Royal Exchange development
- Encourage adoption of and participation in a Cathedral Quarter BID

Objective 4.3: Improve access for pedestrians and cyclists and calm vehicular traffic

High levels of through traffic, a lack of safe crossing points on major roads and the absence of cycle lanes impede pedestrian and cycle access to and through the Cathedral Quarter. The current level of surface car parking - over 500 spaces including on-street, public and private provision - encourages traffic to enter the area and contributes to pollution and congestion. Backstreets serve as shortcuts for taxis and other vehicles seeking to avoid the one-way system in the city centre while cruising for parking or heading for High Street.

[Surface Car Parking Map]

Over 300 commuter buses per day, one every one to two minutes during peak hours, cut through the heart of the Cathedral Quarter along Bridge Street and Donegall Street. Traveling between the Laganside Bus Centre and points north, these buses pick up and discharge commuters on High Street and Bridge Street and use Donegall Street as the quickest route in and out of the city-centre.

[Map of Proposed Traffic Calming Measures]

New Development and Parking

Multi-storey car parking at Saint Anne's Square demonstrates one of the key objectives of the BMTP by directing traffic around the Cathedral Quarter via the Dunbar Link and into the car park, thereby reducing the number of vehicles on the streets. Other development sites around the periphery of the Cathedral Quarter and Royal Exchange offer similar opportunities

[Map of proposed pedestrian and cycle routes]

Key Targets to include:

- The introduction of controlled junctions at major pedestrian and cycle access points
- Installation of cycling lanes and bike racks
- The introduction of a right turn from Talbot Street onto Dunbar Link
- Designation of adequate taxi stands and tour bus parking
- The re-routing of long-range commuter buses and through traffic from Donegall Street to Dunbar Link
- The redevelopment of Dunbar Link as a 'boulevard' in line with BMAP

Steps:

- Lobby relevant agencies and departments for the adoption of the **Cathedral Quarter Transportation Plan** (See Appendix XX)
- Develop proposals for controlled on-street parking
- Coordinate signage from arterial routes into multi-storey or underground car parking

Objective 4.4: Improve access by public transport

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) and the Public Realm Masterplan identify the opportunity to improve public transportation service to the north side of the city-centre and discourage the use of private cars by creating a train station at Gamble Street. Public and private investment will be required to meet the cost, which includes increasing capacity on the existing rail line and bridge. The investment will reap benefits for the Cathedral Quarter, the University of Ulster's Belfast Campus, Royal Exchange, the retail core along Royal Avenue, Clarendon and City Quays, and future development to the north of the city centre.

In the short term, a shuttle bus service linking the Glengall Street and Laganside Bus Centres would eliminate the need for pick-up points in the Cathedral Quarter and would enable commuter buses to exit the city centre via Dunbar Link.

[Map showing links to proposed train station and pedestrian routes to the new Rapid Transit]

Key Targets to include:

- A new Cathedral Quarter / University of Ulster train station at Gamble Street
- Re-instatement of the Centrelink Shuttle Bus between Glengall Street and Laganside Bus Stations

Steps:

- Contribute the Cathedral Quarter perspective to long-range plans for improved access to the city centre
- Partner with UU, Harbour Commissioners and others to lobby relevant agencies for the Cathedral Quarter / University of Ulster Train Station with access to the Cathedral Quarter through the DSD Social Security site

Objective 4.5: Implement best practice in heritage-led regeneration

Large sites and a number of historic and listed buildings have been lying derelict for years, blighting the area and risking further decline or even demolition while developers negotiate favourable terms, seek planning permissions and await improved market conditions.

Living Over the Shops is a Housing Executive town centre living initiative which assists landlords to adapt upper floors for residential use. A pilot scheme in the Cathedral Quarter similar to ones adopted in Lisburn and Derry would contribute vitality and help retain the historic character of the area.

Key Targets to include:

- Increased public awareness and celebration of the area's historic buildings and streetscapes
- Creative re-use of historic buildings
- "Living Over the Shops" in the empty upper floors of historic buildings
- High quality new developments where the opportunity exists, which respect the existing form and scale

Steps:

- Convene forums on design issues relevant to the Cathedral Quarter
- Seek Townscape Heritage Initiative funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund
- Propose the adoption of a "Living Over the Shops" policy for Cathedral Quarter

APPENDIX A

DRAFT

HISTORIC CONTEXT

A.1. Birthplace of Belfast

The Cathedral Quarter is the heart of the old city of Belfast. Its streets and buildings tell the story of the origins of the city and mark out the early stages of its development. Situated at the confluence of the Farset and Lagan rivers, Belfast came to prominence as a market town and trading port for the export of cattle, oats, hides, timber, yarn and other agricultural products, surpassing Carrickfergus in importance by the second half of the 17th century. The town prospered and grew throughout the 18th and 19th centuries from booming cotton, linen and shipbuilding industries, becoming the hub of Irish linen trade and manufacture.

In the early days Front Street, now High Street, ran along either side of the Farset giving access to the quays. Skipper Street was where the captains of the vessels lived, and Bridge Street led to the principal bridge over the river Farset, with other bridges at Skipper Street and Church Lane. Goose Lane, along which fowl were driven to the fields beyond the Corporation boundary, later became North Street.

The port rapidly developed along the more accessible Lagan, and the shallower Farset was covered over sometime around 1770 allowing High Street and Bridge Street to develop as main thoroughfares with fine shops and houses. Broad Street, later named Waring Street after a local businessman, was a main trading hub with access from markets in the town down to the Lagan. The area's narrow back lanes combined goods manufacturing and warehousing with the more humble dwellings of labourers and seamen.

A.2. Flourishing Centre of Culture and Commerce

Archaeological digs in the Cathedral Quarter reveal evidence of 17th and 18th century activity including significant cattle yards, tanneries and the manufacture of delft-like pottery close to the quay. Belfast's earliest churches were clustered here including the 1776 parish church of St. Anne on Donegall Street and St George's on High Street, completed in 1816 - both built on the sites of earlier churches - and the First Presbyterian Church on Rosemary Street. All distances were measured from Waring Street at North Street, Bridge Street and Rosemary Lane and the area became known as the "The Four Corners."

Belfast's oldest civic building, the Assembly Rooms at The Four Corners, was originally built as a single storey market with arcade in 1769 and rebuilt with a second storey and a new civic function room in 1776. Properties along Donegall Street were improved to link the Four Corners with the new St. Anne's Church. The Assembly Rooms became a social focus for the growing city, staging county balls, the famous Harpers Festival of 1792 and other events. In the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, the Assembly Rooms were pressed into service as courtrooms for the trial of Henry Joy McCracken, a leader of the United Irishmen, who was subsequently hanged in public close by. In 1845 the building was converted to the headquarters of The

Belfast Banking Company, which later became the Northern Bank, and remained a branch until 2000.

New Assembly Rooms were created across the square in the Commercial Buildings, also known as the Exchange Building and Northern Whig House, which opened in 1820 and defined the southeast corner of the Four Corners. Further down Waring Street a magnificent Italianate building was constructed in 1857 for the Ulster Bank and would serve as its headquarters for the next 140 years. Other banks sprung up in and around Waring Street in the latter part of the 19th century, reflecting the economic importance of the rapidly expanding city.

The area was also the hub of Belfast's newspaper industry. The Belfast News Letter, the world's oldest continuously published newspaper founded nearby in 1737, moved to ornate new premises in Donegall Street in 1872. The Northern Whig, Irish News and Belfast Telegraph were published nearby. Many architecturally significant buildings were added throughout the 19th century, frequently replacing the original thatched premises, and designed in accordance with Belfast's status as a leading commercial centre.

A.3. Decline and New Beginnings

During the first half of the 20th century, the North Street Arcade and faience buildings on North Street and Donegall Street added important character and style. St. Anne's Cathedral officially replaced the Church of St. Anne's in 1904 on the same site. Construction of the Cathedral continued from the laying of the foundation stone in 1899 to the erection of the Spire of Hope in 2007.

The area was badly hit during the blitz in April 1941 leaving huge gaps at the northern end around Donegall Street, North Street and Royal Avenue, and at the southern end on Bridge Street and High Street. Transport House on High Street, built in the International Style in 1959 as the Belfast headquarters of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union, is an example of post-war architecture and one of Belfast's youngest listed buildings.

Like much of the city centre, the area known as Northside languished during the Troubles. In amongst the backstreets and derelict warehouses were the remnants of Belfast's once-thriving Little Italy and Half Bap neighbourhoods and a few businesses hanging on from more prosperous times.

By the 1980's there was talk of regeneration in Belfast. Businesses and government agencies had taken advantage of government incentives to populate derelict areas of the city centre through a programme of urban development grants. In 1984 the Belfast College of Art & Design, in operation since 1849, merged with the University of Ulster at the York Street Campus. In this period also, the North Street Arcade began to serve as a focal point for bohemian creative activity - its cheap rents and a central location attracting a core of arts and community organisations and small, independent businesses to the area. In 1989 Todd

Architects built new premises on Hill Street and Nick's Warehouse, a restaurant and wine bar, opened next door.

A.4. Laganside

As early as 1986 the Department of the Environment (DoE) began looking at ways to regenerate large areas on either side of the Lagan waterfront, which had once been part of the city's thriving port infrastructure and were now lying derelict. The Laganside Corporation was established by the Northern Ireland government in 1989 as an Urban Development Corporation (UDC) with powers to promote and market development opportunities, undertake infrastructure works, acquire land, enter into agreements for the development of land, and manage the amenities of the River Lagan.

Laganside Corporation's remit was 'to bring into use land and buildings, encourage public and private investment and the development of new industry and commerce, create an attractive environment and ensure that housing, social, recreational and cultural facilities were available to encourage people to live and work in the Designated Areas.'

Northside's strategic importance as a link between the Laganside developments along the river and the city centre was recognised as well as its historic significance as the oldest part of the city. The area was designated a Conservation Area in 1990 and the DoE published the Cathedral Conservation Area Design Guide which stated that the Department's overall objectives for the regeneration of Northside would be to:

- Protect and enhance the essential character of the Cathedral Conservation Area and encourage the retention, rehabilitation and re-use of existing buildings wherever possible;
- Encourage growth and change which is in sympathy with the character and appearance of the Conservation Area;
- Promote the commercial benefits of investing in the area.

A.4.1. From Northside to The Cathedral Quarter

Local playwright Martin Lynch and other artists and activists lobbied for the development of the area as Belfast's cultural quarter. In 1997 the Laganside boundary was extended from 140 to 200 hectares (345 to 493 acres) to include Northside, and the area was renamed the Cathedral Quarter.

Within Laganside's Cathedral Quarter Regeneration Strategy, issued in 1998, the Cathedral Quarter was envisaged as a dynamic and distinctive, mixed use, historical and cultural quarter which would contribute to the economic performance of the city and the region by creating an attractive environment for investment. This would be accomplished by promoting the area as a cultural and entrepreneurial quarter, a specialist retail area for creative design, an urban residential community and a key tourist attraction. The strategy called for sensitive long term

management of both the urban fabric and the economic role of the area, supported by a wide-ranging partnership of departments and agencies.

The strategy outlined 15 key development projects, including a quality arts and cultural venue, public space, streetscape improvements, managed workspaces and studio complexes, opportunities for residential and business development, some of which would be led by Laganside and others by public/private partnerships. In 1996 the Old Museum Arts Centre (OMAC) began the process of collaboration with artistic partners and statutory funders including Laganside, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council (and later the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure) to build a flagship home for the arts in the Cathedral Quarter.

An interim review carried out in 2002 for DoE reflected Laganside's disappointment that it was taking longer than expected to move the strategy forward. Only 3 of the original 15 projects had been completed with another 3 in process. A Community Unit was established in 2004 but had little time to address the social goals of the strategy.

Custom House Square, Laganside's £4.2 million public realm project to create Belfast's largest public space, was completed in 2006 to international acclaim. While not originally part of the Cathedral Quarter designated area, the square's proximity boosted the Cathedral Quarter's identity as the city's cultural quarter by offering unprecedented opportunities for public events and performances in the city centre. Laganside also initiated a funding programme known as the Laganside Events Fund to support events and encourage use of the square. In 2006 the DCAL Minister announced its commitment to fund the building of The MAC.

A.4.2. Wind-down of Laganside

By the time the Laganside Corporation wound down in 2007, it had invested substantial public funds into the Cathedral Quarter and leveraged additional private investment at a ratio of 4 to 1. The completed projects were: the Managed Workspaces on Royal Avenue, Donegall Street and Cotton Court; public space in Cotton Court and Writer's Square; and streetscape improvements on Waring Street, Hill Street, Gordon Street and Commercial Court. Laganside also commissioned and installed over 30 pieces of public art creating a number of Public Art Trails.

Laganside's regeneration efforts in the Cathedral Quarter served as a catalyst for a number of other initiatives, some with government support. The Potthouse building, housing a pub, club and offices, opened on the site of a 19th century pottery at the corner of Hill and Waring Streets. The Commercial Buildings at the Four Corners were refurbished to house the Northern Whig pub and restaurant, Clanmil Housing offices and the Clanmil Arts and Business Centre offering office space for a dozen cultural organisations and businesses. The Black Box opened on Hill Street as a temporary cultural venue in 2006. The Ulster Bank building and adjacent

Ulster Buildings on Waring Street were re-opened in 2006 as the Merchant Hotel and the Cloth Ear bar.

However, in spite of visible progress, the consensus across the city was that the Cathedral Quarter was taking much longer than anticipated to reach its potential. As Laganside was being wound-up with much of its work done in its riverfront areas, it was clear that the Cathedral Quarter still needed further attention and priority given to it. The arts centre, subsequently named The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) experienced delays following [the funders' request from its funders request that The MAC should be expanded](#) to include Northern Ireland's flagship contemporary arts gallery. These delays caused an unfortunate loss of available land, as well as a loss of momentum for the Quarter. But in 2007 OMAC succeeded in securing cross departmental support and appointed an integrated design team. Excitement was re-kindled through a high-profile fundraising campaign launched by Meryl Streep, and extensive consultation with the public and across all sectors.

A.4.3. Handover to Department for Social Development (DSD)

Post-Laganside, the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate within DSD assumed responsibility for the management of the Laganside assets including Custom House Square, Writer's Square, Cotton Court and the Managed Workspaces. It also continued the Laganside Events Fund, which contributed financial and venue support to many of the cultural events in the Cathedral Quarter. In accordance with the Review of Public Administration (RPA), a far-reaching plan under development to restructure local government across Northern Ireland, it was envisaged that DSD would be a temporary custodian of these and other Laganside assets, and would hand all or most of them over to Belfast City Council (BCC) by May 2011.

Without focused and dedicated management or any further initiatives to complete what Laganside had begun, a range of stakeholders were concerned that the impetus for development of the Cathedral Quarter was being lost. Leading arts organisations based in the Cathedral Quarter lobbied local MP, MLA and former DSD Minister Nigel Dodds, who subsequently organised a meeting with the then direct rule DSD minister David Hanson and three representatives of the Cathedral Quarter arts groups. Arising from that meeting, it was agreed that a steering group would be established, a development manager employed and a new strategy developed for the Cathedral Quarter. DSD agreed to fund the initiative and, after lengthy discussion between BCC and DSD, Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) was agreed as the host body for the new role.

[Laganside's 1998 Cathedral Quarter Regeneration Strategy identified 15 key projects for the Cathedral Quarter including sites controlled by Laganside and others in public and private ownership. To date, and with on-going involvement on the part of DSD, the Laganside-controlled projects at Cotton Court, the Four Corners and Saint Anne's Square have been completed as well as environmental enhancement schemes at Writer's Square and the Cathedral and streetscape improvements.](#)

[Further public and private investment in the Cathedral Quarter has delivered a mixed-use scheme on Talbot Street between Hill Street and Donegall Street featuring commercial, residential and cultural facilities, which opened in 2008. In 2009 the University of Ulster announced a major expansion plan for its York Street site and, most significantly for the cultural quarter, The MAC finally broke ground in Saint Anne's Square in December 2009 with an anticipated completion in late 2011.](#)

A.5. DSD and City Centre Development

At the same time that the Cathedral Quarter was moving slowly forward, DSD was looking at ways to regenerate core areas of the city centre with major retail-led regeneration schemes. Following the submission of four private-sector led proposals for different parts of the city centre, DSD decided that the Victoria Square scheme in the south east quadrant would be built first.

When the Victoria Square decision was announced in 2002, DSD Minister Nigel Dodds stated that a smaller retail-led scheme could potentially move forward in the North East Quarter, which overlaps into the Cathedral Quarter, as long as it did not conflict with plans for Victoria Square. Subsequently, a closed shopping mall proposal, Cathedral Way, was submitted to Planning Service for the area between Royal Avenue and Donegall Street. Concerned groups in the Cathedral Quarter and elsewhere in the city expressed strong reservations about the plans. These groups formed around a "Let's Get It Right" (LGIR) campaign which put forward a grassroots stakeholder vision for new development in the area. Culminating in the publication of demands in November 2004, signed by 50 groups, LGIR called for pedestrian priority, active frontages, increased residential provision, revitalisation of historic buildings, support for the evening economy and the removal of cars.

Planning permission for the original Cathedral Way scheme was subsequently denied. With Victoria Square moving towards a scheduled opening in 2008, DSD confirmed that the North-East Quarter would be the next priority area for retail-led regeneration. Leaside, a joint venture between two local companies, Snoddons and William Ewart Properties, and the Netherlands-headquartered ING Real Estate, was designated as the preferred developer for the area.

Leaside's Royal Exchange Proposals, unveiled in 2009, is a mixed-use retail scheme which includes 39,000^m² of retail and leisure space, 8,600^m² of office space, 240 apartments and over 700 car park spaces. The proposal also includes 930^m² for arts and cultural use. Based on open-street patterns, the Royal Exchange proposals aim to improve linkages with the Laganside area and respect the built fabric and character of the Cathedral Quarter.

In November 2009 a development agreement was signed between DSD and Leaside, which commits to the submission of a planning application for the scheme by October 2010. In March and September 2010 the Royal Exchange design team engaged with local stakeholders in a

participation process to give them an opportunity to comment on early designs for the scheme.

APPENDIX B

THE POLICY CONTEXT

Summary

A.6. The following policies and strategies were considered in the preparation of the Cathedral Quarter Development Plan:

Northern Ireland Executive

- Sustainability Development Plan (2006)
- Programme for Government 2008-2011, (February 2008)
- Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 (2008)
- Review of Public Administration (to take effect by May 2011)

Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)

- Regional Economic Strategy (2007)

Department for Regional Development (DRD)

- Shaping Our Future : Regional Development Strategy (RDS), for Northern Ireland 2025 (2001)
- Adjustments to the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2025, June 2008
- Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland (NI) 2002-2012
- Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (2004) and 2025 Strategy

Department of the Environment (DoE)

- Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (2004)
- Planning Policies: Planning Policy Statements (PPS), Supplemental Planning Guidelines,

Department for Social Development (DSD)

- North East Quarter Masterplan (Feb 2005)
- People & Place: Public Realm Strategy for Belfast City Centre 2005
- Belfast City Centre Public Realm Masterplan 2006
- Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy Statement 2006
- Belfast Physical Regeneration Conceptual Masterplans (Renewing Communities) – (Published in draft for public consultation in October 2009)
- Inquiry Into Town Centre Regeneration, DSD Committee Report (November 2009)

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

- Think, Create, Innovate – Regional Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland (2003)
- Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Action Plan 2008 – 2011 (2008)

Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) - reports to DETI

- Planning our Route to Success: Northern Ireland Tourist Board Corporate Plan 2008-2011

Invest NI - reports to DETI

- The Northern Ireland Digital Content Strategy (2008)

Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)

- Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland (2006)
- Corporate Plan (2008)

Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) - reports to DCAL

- Creative Connections: a 5 year plan for developing the Arts 2007 – 2012 (2007)
- Strategic Action Plan: Creative Industries in Northern Ireland (2008) with DETI and others
- Creative Blueprint Northern Ireland: Creative and Cultural Skills (2008) with DETI and others

Belfast City Council (BCC)

- Belfast Capital City II 2006-2010
- Staying Competitive (Local Economic Development Plan) 2006 - 2010
- An Integrated Cultural Strategy for Belfast (2007)
- Public Space for a Shared Belfast (2008)- A research report for BCC Good Relations Unit
- Draft BCC NITB Integrated Cultural Tourism Strategy 2010-2014 (draft – March 2010)
- BCC Draft Transportation Strategy

A.7. The Cathedral Quarter's Strategic Role

The Cathedral Quarter is a key part of today's city centre and a link to the retail core, a thriving mixed-use quarter, a hot spot of creativity and innovation, shared cultural space in a still-divided city, and an increasingly popular destination for citizens and visitors. There are direct and indirect references to the Cathedral Quarter throughout the body of current policies, plans and strategies which guide decision-making in Northern Ireland. The area is referred to as a physical link, a gateway, an economic engine, a social network, a catalyst, an inspiration, a showcase and a brand, and, as such, is integral to achieving many of the region's policy goals. A more detailed analysis of the policies and how they are shaping the Cathedral Quarter follows:

A.8. Regional Policies

In 2006 the newly-devolved government of Northern Ireland published the Northern Ireland Executive's (NIE) **Sustainability Development Plan**, which is about balancing economic, social and environmental goals. In 2008 the **Programme for Government (PfG)** led with the goal of growing a dynamic economy. **PfG** and the earlier **Economic Vision for Northern Ireland (2005)** set the strategic context for the **Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 (ISNI)**, which addresses 'infrastructure investment in support of economic, societal and environmental

sustainability' through six investment pillars and 23 sub-pillars. The **Budget 2008-11** and other departmental plans and policies are broadly in alignment with these plans.

Many of the measures supported through the six investment pillars of the Investment Strategy and related departmental policies are directly relevant to the development of the Cathedral Quarter including productivity, skills development, employment, tourism, equality, healthy lifestyles, access to culture, sustainable development, urban regeneration, improved transport infrastructure and protecting the environment.

A.9. Spatial Strategies

Spatial strategies and plans such as the **Regional Development Strategy (RDS)**, **Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)**, **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP)** and **Belfast Metropolitan Transportation Plan (BMTP)** reinforce the role of Belfast as the regional capital and main transportation hub. BMAP and BMTP further reinforce the importance of a cohesive and efficient city centre to the economic growth of Belfast and the region. The historic character of Belfast is protected under **Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage**, and supplementary planning guidance through the **Cathedral and Belfast City Centre Conservation Area Guides**.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) sets out regeneration objectives for Belfast City Centre in its **Regeneration Policy Statement (RPS)**. The objectives are implemented through a series of strategies and master plans including the **North East Quarter Masterplan**, the **Public Realm Strategy**, and **Belfast City Centre Public Realm Masterplan**. The North East Quarter Master plan will guide the development of the Royal Exchange scheme, which overlaps the Cathedral Quarter.

The **North East Quarter Masterplan** provides guidance for the major retail development scheme, Royal Exchange, which will overlap the Cathedral Quarter. Key objectives relevant to the Cathedral Quarter require the scheme to:

- be outward-facing;
- demonstrate its potential to pump prime the wider regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter. This is a function of external appearance, pedestrian connectivity and mix of uses;
- provide a mix of uses other than retail;
- respect the fine urban grain of the area;
- respect the built fabric, character and historic street form of the Cathedral Quarter Conservation Area character and policy with particular attention to bringing the listed buildings back into productive use;
- bring about the regeneration of the tertiary retail sector of the City centre;
- not prejudice plans for the wider regeneration of Cathedral Quarter through inappropriate form and scale;

- put in place appropriate connections to the Cathedral Quarter, Laganside and the Victoria Square area;

There are several recurring priorities and proposals in these spatial strategies to address connectivity and permeability in the city centre, which directly relate to the Cathedral Quarter. These include proposals for a public transportation hub and train station at Gamble Street; a re-design of Dunbar Link to create an urban boulevard and reduce severance; the creation of a series of small, interconnected public spaces in the city centre; and the development of strong links to surrounding communities.

The transportation hub and train station were deemed too expensive to be justified within BMAP's initial timeframe, however DRD reserves the option to reconsider the proposal as development plans for the University of Ulster Belfast Campus, Clarendon and Royal Exchange move forward.

A.10. Arts & Culture

The need for investment in arts and cultural infrastructure is addressed through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) **Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018**.

In 2008, an inter-departmental group including DCAL, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI jointly published the **Strategic Action Plan: Creative Industries in Northern Ireland 2008**. ACNI served as lead partner for NI and worked closely with DEL, DETI and Invest NI to develop an action plan for skills development in creative industries, **Creative Blueprint Northern Ireland: Creative and Cultural Skills, June 2008**. These current plans for the development of the creative industries are based on earlier policies developed by DCAL in partnership with other agencies, including **Unlocking Creativity – A Strategy for Development (2000)**; **Unlocking Creativity – Making it Happen (2001)**; **Unlocking Creativity – A Creative Region (2004)** – all of which were developed with extensive participation from a broad range of stakeholders, including Cathedral Quarter arts groups.

A.11. Innovation & Business Development

DETI policy **Think, Create, Innovate – Regional Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland (RIS)** and the **Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Action Plan 2008 – 2011** guide the strategies and plans of NITB and INVEST NI: **Planning our Route to Success: Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) Corporate Plan 2008-2011**; **INVEST NI Corporate Plan 2008**; and the **Northern Ireland Digital Content Strategy**.

A.12. Review of Public Administration

The **Review of Public Administration (RPA)**, the first major examination in over thirty years of how public services in Northern Ireland are organised and delivered, was formally launched by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2002. The RPA, which is scheduled to take effect by May 2011, will reduce the number of councils in Northern Ireland from 26 to 11. A number of responsibilities will move from central government to councils including: planning functions; urban regeneration and community development delivery functions; some housing functions; and a number of functions associated with driving forward local economic development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure. The RPA will also affect areas of funding currently controlled by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, moving responsibility for community and social cohesion into local council control.

The migration of these responsibilities from government departments to BCC will have far-reaching implications for the strategic development and stewardship of the Cathedral Quarter. The transition, somewhat delayed from its original timescale, will result in more local control, and represents a real opportunity to integrate planning, funding, and the delivery of services in the Cathedral Quarter.

A.13. Belfast City Council & Local Control under RPA

The BCC Local Economic Development Plan, **Staying Competitive 2006 – 2010**, currently under review, deals with business competitiveness, the nurturing of local talent, and community economic regeneration. Objectives include the development of key growth sectors; business incubation and the growth of small to medium enterprises (SME's); stronger links between education and industry; and support for area-based economic activity.

In 2007 Belfast City Council developed **An Integrated Cultural Strategy for Belfast – Culture at the heart of our city's development** in partnership with DCAL and ACNI. BCC has recently published a **Draft BCC NITB Integrated Cultural Tourism Strategy 2010-2014**, an integrated framework between Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Analysis

In 2006 the newly-devolved government of Northern Ireland published The **Sustainability Development Plan**, which is about balancing economic, social and environmental goals. In 2008 the **Programme for Government (PfG)** outlined five broad goals, leading with the goal of growing a dynamic economy. **PfG** and the earlier **Economic Vision for Northern Ireland (2005)** set the strategic context for the **Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 (ISNI)**, which addresses 'infrastructure investment in support of economic, societal and environmental sustainability' through six investment pillars and 23 sub-pillars. The budget and other departmental plans and policies have been published and existing policies reviewed to bring them into alignment with these plans.

Many of the measures supported through the six investment pillars of the Investment Strategy and related departmental policies have a direct impact on the development of the Cathedral Quarter including productivity, skills development, employment, tourism, equality, healthy lifestyles, access to culture, sustainable development, urban regeneration, improved transport infrastructure and protecting the environment.

The Investment Strategy calls for improved access to urban centres, enhanced public transportation networks and aims to ‘encourage a shift away from private cars particularly in urban areas.’ It supports: increased connectivity through broadband; capital development projects and the purchasing of assets to strengthen voluntary and community organisations; improved attractiveness for residents and tourists; arts and cultural infrastructure investment; strategic re-development in Belfast including major mixed-use schemes; high-quality cultural tourism product; and the development of industry sectors that introduce new technologies, processes and associated skills.

A Shared Future and Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

March 2005 saw the publication by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) of **A Shared Future – Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland**. This was a cross departmental strategy. A Triennial Action Plan was produced which gave government departments responsibility for actions under eleven priority areas including: tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism and racism; reclaiming shared space and reducing tensions at interface areas.

When devolution was resorted in 2007, OFMDFM initiated the development of a new strategy **Cohesion, Sharing and Integration** to integrate the race and community relations strategies. This new strategy will:

“...develop a Programme that will take into account our PfG commitments on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration as well as those on Racial Equality and Social Inclusion in order to reflect the changing context we are facing as a community” (Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration: Update report to Assembly Committee for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, 9 April 2009)

A Shared Future was led by objectives and actions for government departments. The new cohesion, sharing and integration strategy is focused much more at local and community levels. This strategy has now been agreed by the first minister and deputy first minister and will be put out for public consultation soon.

Spacial Strategies

DRD’s **Regional Development Strategy (RDS)**, first published in 2001 and currently under review, supports sustainable patterns of development and emphasises social cohesion and economic development. It states that ‘a strong and vibrant metropolitan area is fundamental to

the continuing social and economic development of the region' and calls for a reinforced role for Belfast as regional capital and a stronger role as an international city.

The RDS provides a strategic policy context for urban environment proposals set out in the **Draft Belfast Metropolitan Plan 2015 (BMAP)**, published by DoE in 2004, and lays the groundwork for 'an urban renaissance throughout the Belfast Metropolitan Area'. The **Spatial Strategy** in the RDS focuses on growth poles to act as centre-magnets to the Belfast Metropolitan Area, providing a framework for balanced growth. One of the aims of the **Spatial Development Framework** within RDS is 'to develop the Cathedral Quarter as a dynamic and distinctive mixed use, historical and cultural quarter.'

DRD's **Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS)**, closely related to and aligned with the RDS, acknowledges decades of under-investment in roads and public transport. In addition to investment in roads infrastructure, RTS calls for upgraded rail networks and increased rail capacity, improved buses and a rapid transit system for Belfast. While the RTS aims for a 'publicly acceptable shift from private car to bus and rail', recent consultation highlights the need to 'address a bias of spend on Roads v Public Transport'. In the Belfast Metropolitan Area, the RTS is being implemented through the **Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 and 2025 Strategy**, both of which support development proposals contained in BMAP. Together BMAP and BMTP seek to provide an integrated approach to future development in the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

Just as the RDS and RTS emphasise the strategic importance of Belfast as a strong regional capital, BMAP and BMTP outline the significance of a strong city-centre to the future of Belfast. The BMTP is organised through four modal themes, all highly relevant to plans for the Cathedral Quarter: provision for walking and cycling – such as walking corridors and cycle routes; public transport measures – such as bus and rail schemes; highway measures – such as road schemes; and management measures – such as parking controls or traffic management used to control traffic and influence travel demands and patterns.

The Cathedral Quarter is adjacent to the Belfast Cross Concept within the BMTP and at the centre of the High Accessibility Zone, both of which support high levels of pedestrian priority. The Plan proposes an urban boulevard for Dunbar Link. It also retains options 'to provide new and improved rail stations and major public transport interchanges within Belfast city centre as part of the potential redevelopment of sites at Great Victoria Street and Gamble Street', further stating that 'these schemes are subject to developer contributions and their implementation is expected to be outside the 2015 Plan period.'

BMAP seeks 'to create a thriving metropolitan area with Belfast city centre as the focus. Its strategic objectives are to: enhance the role of the City of Belfast, develop the metropolitan area, and improve transport. BMAP includes a **Belfast City Centre Strategy (BCCS)**.

Conservation and Design

The Cathedral Quarter is a designated conservation area, supported by the **Cathedral Conservation Area Design Guide**, and one of three parts of the city centre which together form Character Area 4 – The Scotch and Cathedral Quarters. DoE’s objectives for the regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter, as outlined in the Design Guide, are to: protect and enhance the essential character of the Cathedral Conservation Area and encourage the retention, rehabilitation and re-use of existing buildings wherever possible; encourage growth and change which is in sympathy with the character and appearance of the Conservation Area; and promote the commercial benefits of investing in the Area.

Policies CC 103 –CC 105 contain additional design criteria to be applied within conservation areas in the city centre, stating that development proposals within City Centre Conservation Areas will be assessed in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy **PPS 6 – Archaeology and the Built Heritage, Policy UE2** (Urban Environment) and other relevant design guidance.

The design criteria governing development in are extensive and comprehensive, and include consideration of

The Cathedral Quarter falls within an Area of Parking Restraint as designated by **CC 102 Area of Parking Restraint** and subject to standards contained in Policy **TRAN 4** which calls for 1 parking space per dwelling and a non-residential standard of 1 space per 300 square metres of non-operational and 1 space per 930 square metres for operational space.

City Centre Regeneration

In 2004, the Department for Social Development (DSD) published its **Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy Statement for Belfast City Centre (RPS)** to promote and implement a comprehensive approach to tackling social, economic and physical regeneration. RPS includes a broad range of objectives and includes the Department’s immediate plans and priorities under five themes: retail; office/business; tourism/leisure; connectivity/public realm; and reinforcing city communities. The main shopping area of the city centre is divided into four shopping quarters, with the North East Quarter extending east from Royal Avenue and overlapping the Cathedral Quarter and the Cathedral Conservation Area. The Victoria Square Development Scheme in the South East Quarter, to be developed in partnership with Laganside Corporation, is identified as the priority, with consideration of support for a subsequent and complementary scheme in the North East Quarter, which could contribute to Laganside’s Cathedral Quarter initiative.

The **Northeast Quarter Masterplan** (2005) will guide the developers of the Royal Exchange retail scheme. The Masterplan objectives are to: contribute to the wider regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter through external appearance, pedestrian connectivity and mix of uses; to respect its built fabric, character and historic street form and Conservation Area character with particular attention to bringing listed buildings back into use; and to guard against compromising its regeneration through inappropriate form and scale. The guiding principles

include: character preservation; destination creation; retention where possible of historic buildings and facades; commercial attractiveness; traffic calming; quality public spaces; encouraging a 24 hour environment; and promoting sustainable economic and social regeneration of the North East Quarter.

In 2005 DSD also published **People & Place: Public Realm Strategy for Belfast City Centre** which includes the strategic aims of identifying and revealing the city's assets and enabling the pedestrian, and the specific aim of defining City Quarters to exploit Belfast's historic roots. The Strategy proposed a Civic Spine running north/south through the city centre to link its disparate areas including the Cathedral Quarter. The Strategy examined how existing design in the public realm either enhances or hinders connectivity and outlines proposals. The setting of St. Anne's Cathedral (now Belfast Cathedral), the University of Ulster campus and adjoining public space at the northern end of the Cathedral Quarter, and Bridge Street and The Four Corners at the southern end are identified as areas which needed improvement. The North East Quarter Masterplan is included as a Catalyst Project in the Strategy.

In 2006 the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) published a built environment policy, **Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland (2006)** to promote innovation and creative thinking as drivers of both good design and economic sustainability, and to stimulate public appreciation of the architectural, cultural and natural heritage.

Citing lack of cultural infrastructure as the reason for Belfast's failed bid to be the EU Capital of Culture in 2008, DCAL has secured significant investment for arts projects through its **Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018**, including £17.7 million for The MAC in the Cathedral Quarter. The Investment Strategy aims to 'ensure the widest possible audience is able to experience and appreciate our cultural assets'. The spend will increase access to the arts and audiences, tourism potential and employment opportunities for artists and in the creative industries.

Arts and Culture

In 2007, the Arts Council **Creative Connections: a 5 year plan for developing the Arts 2007 – 2012 (2007)** 'to place arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life'. The vision of the strategy is to keep pace with the artistic and cultural expectations of a modern society, to make a real contribution to the social, economic and cultural regeneration of Northern Ireland. Organised around four themes: promoting the value of the arts; strengthening the arts; growing audiences and increasing participation; and improving internal performance, the Strategy is integral to the 'Social' pillar as defined in the ISNI Investment Framework.

The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is the Government lead on the creative industries and works closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry (DETI), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Invest NI, the Arts Council (ACNI), the local Universities, Sectoral Skills Councils and other bodies to map out how to support and develop the creative industries in Northern Ireland.

DCAL, ACNI, DEL, DETI and Invest NI jointly published **Strategic Action Plan: Creative Industries in Northern Ireland 2008**. The Action Plan analyses existing provision and gaps and identifies priorities for action under three broad themes: innovation in business; innovation through people; and innovation through sectoral infrastructure and knowledge. The Plan's goal is to develop and/or exploit 'new creative content, products, services & experiences which can underpin sustainable creative businesses capable of serving local, national & international markets.' Priorities for business innovation include: the development of new content, products, services and experiences; support for risk-taking and the creation of new businesses. Priorities for innovation through people include skills development and support for entrepreneurial activity and talent. Priorities for innovation through sectoral infrastructure and knowledge include understanding linkages to wider policies, developing partnerships, and creative branding for Northern Ireland.

The Arts Council acted as lead partner to develop an action plan for ... **Creative Blueprint Northern Ireland: Creative and Cultural Skills, June 2008**. The Blueprint includes people working in: advertising; craft; cultural heritage; design; literature; music; performing arts; and visual arts. Five key challenges are identified: technical and specialist skills gaps; higher skills needed in business and enterprise; confusion about what training is available and what qualifications are needed; workforce diversity – there should be opportunities for everyone; Employers and practitioners need to commit to training and development. The programme for action includes: creative apprenticeships; creative and cultural leadership programme; Northern Ireland careers strategy; continuing professional development; Northern Ireland links to the National Skills Academy UK Design Skills Alliance; business in creative courses; qualification reform; diversity; and a research agenda.

Innovation and Business Development

Think, Create, Innovate – Regional Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland (RIS) published by DETI in 2003, and the subsequent **Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Action Plan 2008 – 2011** identify four key economic drivers: innovation, enterprise, skills and infrastructure. The four key priorities of the RIS are to: create a coherent R&D and innovation infrastructure; enhance the use of R&D and innovation by the business sector; develop a culture of innovation and enterprise; and sustain the regional innovation system.

Planning our Route to Success: Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) Corporate Plan 2008-2011. The Plan analyses existing provision and gaps. It concludes that, in terms of product development, the cities' product needs: new events and festivals that enhance visitor experience; investment in high quality public realm and urban spaces; evening and weekend economy; interpretation and development of the existing built environment; providing insight into the history and life of our communities; and development of the food and drink offering. NITB's **Culture and Heritage Plan** focuses on signature projects, but also identifies three key areas for development in addition to these projects: living culture, heritage; and arts and crafts.

In these areas, additional product development is required: to enhance interpretation and develop culture & animation programmes that bring the stories to life; to ensure that opening times and access are in line with visitor needs; to provide better interpretation, suitable touring routes and product translated into packages easily purchased by visitors; to offer events programmes that grow regional spread.

The **INVEST NI Corporate Plan 2008** aims to increase business productivity, the means by which wealth can be created for the benefit of the whole community. The main short-term priority is to realise the potential of existing businesses across all sectors. In 2008, INVEST NI also published the **Northern Ireland Digital Content Strategy** in consultation with industry stakeholders. The Strategy targets digital animation, mobile and web content, and e-learning/serious gaming. Five key issues that need to be addressed if the sector is to grow and flourish are; leadership; investment; skills and training; research, development & innovation; and internationalisation.

Review of Public Administration

Under the Northern Ireland Executive's **Review of Public Administration** the number of councils in Northern Ireland will be reduced from 26 to 11. A number of responsibilities will move from central government to councils including: planning functions; urban regeneration and community development delivery functions; some housing functions; and a number of functions associated with driving forward local economic development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure.

Belfast City Council

A number of Belfast City Council's policies are currently under review. These include:

Belfast Capital City II 2006-2010, which pursued the following goals across departments:

- Providing civic leadership
- Working with others to ensure that coordinated solutions are developed in response to the challenges facing the city
- Improving quality of life now and for future generations
- Creating a cleaner, more attractive, safer and healthier city, with a strong economy
- Promoting good relations
- Promoting fair treatment, understanding and respect for people of all cultures
- Delivering best services
- Providing the high quality, value-for money services that people need, when and where they need them.

Staying Competitive, the Local Economic Development Plan for 2006 – 2010, published by the BCC Development Department seeks to promote business competitiveness by stimulating business growth; to promote talent by establishing links between education and industry and by promoting Belfast as a knowledge city; and to promote community economic regeneration by supporting area-based economic development activity and employment.

In 2007, working in partnership with DCAL, ACNI and others, Belfast City Council published **An Integrated Cultural Strategy for Belfast - Culture at the heart of our city's development**. The vision of the strategy is to create a vibrant, cultural capital where arts and culture are placed firmly at the centre of economic, social and environmental regeneration in a way which inspires, empowers and elevates those who live, work in and visit the city. In anticipation of the changes to be implemented under the RPA, the strategy sets out a framework to create a joined-up approach to the development of Belfast's cultural sectors. The strategy is organised around the themes of strategic leadership, creating wealth, and quality of life. The theme of creating wealth includes aims and objectives to promote the economic potential of creative clusters in the city by: developing the potential of cultural quarters such as the Cathedral Quarter, Queen's Quarter, Titanic Quarter and Gaeltacht Quarter; and supporting creative clusters as drivers for creative industries.

In 2009 the Development Department within Belfast City Council was reorganised reflecting a shift in emphasis from culture and arts to cultural tourism. In March 2010, the Development Department published the **Draft BCC NITB Integrated Cultural Tourism Strategy 2010-2014**, an integrated framework between Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Underpinned by a commitment to sustainability, the strategy seeks to 'deliver the authentic Capital City experience by developing and coordinating cultural, natural and commercial assets to attract a greater number of visitors to the city and maximise the economic benefits for Belfast and Northern Ireland.' The aims include to: develop a strong positive reputation as a welcoming gateway and business tourism destination, spread the economic benefit of tourism, offer a broad range of access services, stage a consistent annual programme of events and festivals; and improve services and facilities.