

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CATHEDRAL QUARTER STEERING GROUP DRAFT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Cathedral Quarter Draft Strategy BCC response

1. Background & Discussion

The draft Cathedral Quarter (CQ) Strategy 2010-2015 proposes to establish a Management Trust which 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

Whilst the Management Trust would provide a focus for the CQ, Belfast City Council would have concerns that other areas across the city would want to adopt a similar approach and Council would need to consider this carefully within a city wide context, before any precedent is set. It is difficult to determine the power of a Trust within the current constraints of government departments.

Private / public sector financial models to support the development of Cathedral Quarter must be fully explored.

2. The CQ 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

Belfast City Council (BCC) broadly supports the 4 Priorities identified in the strategy

BCC notes that the draft strategy contains highly ambitious aspirations for the area in a relatively short period of time. These aspirations are commendable however need to be strengthened by a short, medium and long term implementation plan where the **Key Targets should be SMART - specific, measurable, achievable and timebound.**

CONSULTATION

BCC recommends that the Development Plan is open to consultation with a wider stakeholder network and not only those with direct interest in the Cathedral Quarter.

MARKETING, COMMUNICATION & VISITOR SERVICING

BCC would recommend that marketing and communication plans are strengthened in the implementation plan and that the proposed management trust works closely in partnership with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB).

It is also noted that the key target under Objective 3.3. to include “*Visitor information point(s) in the Cathedral Quarter*” must be done in partnership with the Belfast Welcome Centre and in consideration government departments that have the legislative powers over public land.

STREET TRADING & MARKET DEVELOPMENT

The CQ Draft Strategy does not allude to the development of on street trading or market development in the area. BCC has worked closely with representatives from the CQSG on designating locations in the CQ realm and seeks clarification on whether this remains an aspiration for the CQSC.

DEVELOPMENTS

Objective 2.2: Balance public and private land use to meet the needs of the cultural quarter (page 22) has a Key target to include: establish CQ as a Business Improvement District (BID) to facilitate zoning implementation. The plan should note that Northern Ireland at present does not have the legislative authority to establish a BID and the new Management Trust must factor into their plan that any change in legislation will take a number of years.

The role of DSD should be emphasised in bringing forward Royal Exchange and any other improvements in the adjoining NW quarter of the City.

The potential impact of the redevelopment of Central Library should be noted in the plan as LibrariesNI, through funding from Department of Culture and Leisure, plan to develop a mediatech facility and a £30m refurbishment completed in 2014. This development of arts infrastructure should be maximised in the CQ Development Plan.

OPERATIONAL

Within Objective 4.1 of the Consultation, (*Ensure a clean, safe and well-functioning public realm through effective local management*), it does mention that 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. BCC recommends that there is a need to ensure that any development within the area takes into account waste storage facilities and access to these.

This would also be recommended in a number of other objectives including:

- Objective 1.4:** *Expand and renew the Managed Workspace provision*
Objective 3.4: *Promote best practice to ensure maximum accessibility to Cathedral Quarter premises, public spaces, services and activities*
Objective 4.3: *Improve access for pedestrians and cyclists and calm the traffic*

CQSG should access the following link for full guidance:

<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/buildingcontrol/wastestorage.asp>

FUNDING

BCC supports the plan but at this stage will not commit to any funding packages referred to in the plan.

3. Summary:

1. Members ask that the CQSG note that this plan necessitates wider consultation with all stakeholders and not just those with a direct interest in the Cathedral Quarter.
2. Council is minded to support the Plan however there would be no commitment at this stage to any of the funding packages referred to in the Plan.
3. The Cathedral Quarter Vision and Framework is top line and reflects the council's own strategies in relation to tourism, culture and arts; Cathedral Quarter is listed as one of the 9 tourism place destinations in the Belfast Integrated Strategic Framework.
4. BCC recommends that there is a need to ensure that any development within the area takes into account waste storage facilities and access to these.
5. The role of DSD should be emphasised in bringing forward Royal Exchange and any other improvements in the adjoining NW quarter of the City.
6. The potential of the impact of the redevelopment of Central Library should be developed as they plan a mediatech facility and hope to have a £30m refurbish completed in 2014.
7. BCC currently supports the work of the CQSG and will support their work along with all stakeholders and partners by sitting on the steering group at senior officer level.
8. Any emerging management structure should be considered on a city wide basis and innovative financing models should be explored.
9. Cathedral Quarter will include the MAC which when opened in 2012 will play a key role in supporting the culture and arts sector across the city.
10. Cathedral Quarter and its public spaces including Custom House Square provide the City with exciting event potential. Development and outreach initiatives similar to that explored as part of Culture Night should be developed further.
11. It is important that the CQ is not seen in isolation and is connected to other parts of the city including Titanic Quarter and North Belfast via the North Belfast Cultural Corridor both physically and through public transport.

12. The development of the University and Royal Exchange are critical to the success of CQ and BCC should continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure the maximum opportunities are exploited with both of these significant developments for not only CQ but for the city.
13. The strategy requires an action plan for implementation.