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Dear Martin

Thank you for your letter seeking our initial views on the draft Development Strategy for the Crumlin Road Gaol setting out the rationale, vision and development objectives for the site.

North Belfast has experienced significant levels of deprivation and the Crumlin Road Gaol is a key physical and historical site along the arterial route leading into the city centre. The Council has recognised the potential importance of the Crumlin Road Gaol as a tourist and economic driver for regeneration in the area. It has the potential to be a unique experience for visitors to Belfast as acknowledged in the Belfast Integrated Tourism Framework. It also forms a key site for the development of the North Belfast Cultural Corridor which stretches from the Gaol and Crumlin Road Courthouse to the Cathedral Quarter, linking a series of stepping stones that provide access to a diverse cultural experience such as Clifton Street Orange Hall, Indian Community Centre and Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church.

As you have referred to, a strategic approach to the development of Gaol is essential in order to maximise the potential of the development of the Gaol in terms of its sustainability, regenerative impact on neighbouring communities and the city. In addition to the environmental improvement of the area and the assets referred to in the draft Strategy, such as Girdwood and the physical and historical link between the Gaol and the Courthouse, the Council also has a number of capital enhancement projects in the vicinity of the Gaol that would need to be taken account of in order to support such a strategic approach to regeneration of the neighbourhoods in the Gaol's proximity. The potential impact of the development of the Gaol for the city, also needs to be considered in the context of other proposed developments towards the north of the city centre such as the University of Ulster's campus relocation and Royal Exchange.

To maximise the long term benefits and the success of the development of the Gaol, consultation with local communities and businesses will be critical. Engagement with the Council's political process will form an essential aspect of this to enhance the benefits and ensure a strategic approach to the development of the site for the city, particularly with the impending Local Government Reform. In addition to the plans for consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, we would emphasise the importance of engaging in the political process to enhance support for any strategy and its resultant implementation.

While we realise you have asked for early views on the draft strategy, this would be a landmark development for the area with the potential to connect to the existing assets, planned developments and programmes in the area. The Council will need to give the strategy detailed consideration that takes account of the political process; which there has not been enough time for with this initial pre-consultation request.

We look forward to receiving the draft strategy for consultation and welcome the opportunity to provide a considered Council response. Equally, we would like to be consulted on any future specific projects within the overall strategy.

Yours sincerely,