



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: BT1 Gateway & Library Square DSD Consultation response; Bank Square Update

Date: 19 February 2013

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In December 2012 the Department for Social Development (DSD) issued for consultation two regeneration schemes for Belfast City Centre namely the BT1 Gateway Site Development Proposal at the corner of Upper North Street and a Design Statement for Library Square, a new city centre square to the rear of Central Library.
1.2	It is likely that each scheme will be progressed on an individual basis, however, due to its proximity to Streets Ahead Phase III the Library Square scheme may be implemented as part of this wider project depending on funding. DSD welcome comments on design, concept and any other relevant observations for both the BT1 Gateway consultation and the Library Square consultation.
1.3	The consultation documents were circulated to relevant Council Departments to enable contribution to the draft response.
1.4	See Appendix 1 for a draft response to both schemes. Appendix 2 contains the BT1 Gateway consultation document. Appendix 3 contains the Library Square consultation document.
1.5	Comments on both schemes must be received by DSD by 12 noon on 22 February 2013.

1.6	An update has been received from DSD on the Bank Square Project. It is envisaged that works will begin on this project in Spring of this year and last for around 18 months. See Appendix 4 for the relevant drawings, including details of raised platforms on Berry Street West.
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2	Key Issues
2.1	<p><u>BT1 Gateway Proposal</u> The BT1 Gateway site is located at the junction of North Street, Kent Street and Carrick Hill. The 0.47 hectare (1.2 acre) site is partly cleared with the remainder of the site containing the Kent Street car park and a bingo hall.</p>
2.2	The site is in public ownership and according to the consultation document DSD will be able to secure vacant possession prior to redevelopment.
2.3	The DSD preferred option proposes a mixed-use development of a foodstore, hotel and undercroft parking. These proposed uses are the outcome of market analysis and stakeholder consultation process. DSD describe the proposed schemes as commercially attractive, offering local employment opportunities and in line with wider regeneration aspirations for the Northside of the City.
2.4	<p><u>BT1 Gateway Key Issues for BCC</u> The BT1 Gateway is a key site in terms of its potential capacity to regenerate the north west of the City Centre. This area currently suffers from the heavy road infrastructure of the inner city ring road which acts as a barrier to the adjacent communities and as such the Council would encourage greater intervention to improve pedestrian access in addition to the widening of footways and modifications to signal timings.</p>
2.5	Belfast Tourism: Gateway To The Future, the Council's integrated strategic framework to co-ordinate tourism development in Belfast in 2011–2014, was published in March 2011 and identifies a weakness in the City's offering of Boutique Hotels and apart-hotels. Whilst hotel accommodation in the BT1 Gateway area of the City is currently poor consideration should be given to the type of hotel accommodation that will likely be in demand by the time construction has completed.
2.6	With the expected move into the City Centre by the University of Ulster the proposed development of a food store in this location will help meet the likely demands of over 12,000 students and staff coming in to this general area.
2.7	In the context of the new University of Ulster City Centre campus and the ongoing student-accommodation related pressures experienced in the city, in the event that the proposed mix of uses for this site were to be reconsidered it may be worth DSD exploring the potential regenerative

	benefits that managed purpose built student accommodation could have in this location.
2.8	<p><u>Library Square</u></p> <p>The Library Square proposal is a ‘new landmark public space’ proposed for Belfast city centre’s Northside at the junction of Little Donegall Street, Library Street and Royal Avenue. Delivery of the project is subject to approval for the business case, available funding and obtaining statutory planning permission. The estimated build cost for this project is £3m. DSD’s vision for Library Square encapsulates the following core priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The creation of an animated shared space with active ground floor uses; – Create a high quality pause point in the North Belfast Cultural Corridor; – A high quality environment in line with the Belfast: Streets Ahead public realm programme; – An accessible leisure destination, for both residents and visitors to the city; and, – A catalyst to help promote the regeneration of the wider Northside.
2.9	The Library Square proposals aim to promote the use of media and social connectivity, by providing a communications connectivity hotspot, facilitating the use of public access to wireless networks; providing for interactive media in the Square, potentially through the installation of a media wall/screen.
2.10	<p><u>Library Square Key Issues for BCC</u></p> <p>This part of the City will experience a number of major investments in the coming years including the proposed Greater Belfast Development by the University of Ulster, Streets Ahead Phase III and the aforementioned BT1 Gateway proposal. In this context the Library Square proposal is a welcome environmental improvement scheme in an area that has suffered in recent years from a lack of inward investment.</p>
2.11	Due to the expected investment in the area outlined above, and the Super-connected Belfast project it will be essential that the Library Square scheme engages with the relevant stakeholders, including the Council, to help maximise as much benefit from this investment as possible.
2.12	See Appendix 1 for a draft Council response to the Library Square scheme.
2.13	The draft response in Appendix 1 outlines that the Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the respective development proposals and encourages early engagement with the Council for future development schemes of this nature. The draft response also outlines the need for development schemes such as BT1 Gateway and Library Square to be considered in the context of an overall strategic plan for city development.

3	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

4	Recommendations
4.1	Members are requested to consider the appended draft response and agree for submission to the Department for Social Development.
4.2	Members are requested to note the Bank Square project update.

6	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 – Draft Response to BT1 Gateway and Library Square consultations	
Appendix 2 – BT1 Gateway Consultation Document	
Appendix 3 – Library Square Consultation Document	
Appendix 4 – Bank Square Project drawings	

Draft Belfast City Council Response to BT1 Gateway Site Development Proposal and Library Square Consultations

Introduction

This document is a response from Belfast City Council to the Department of Social Development relating to the public consultation on the 'BT1 Gateway Site Development Proposal' and Library Square consultations. The Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the respective development proposals and encourages early engagement with the Council for future development schemes of this nature. The Council would encourage future development schemes, such as BT1 Gateway and Library Square, to be considered in the context of an overall strategic plan for future development city development.

BT1 Gateway Site Development Proposal

Belfast City Council welcomes this opportunity to comment on the site development proposal for what is a key site on the North West fringe of the city centre.

The BT1 Gateway site is at a critical location for this part of the City. Realising the potential of this site through redevelopment can lead to a number of positive impacts on the locality including improved connectivity to the city centre, provide local job opportunities and help capitalise on the anticipated investment from University of Ulster Greater Belfast Development on nearby lands.

The Council acknowledges the importance of this site for the area and welcomes the intent from DSD to develop this site.

The Council has considered the content of the Site Development Proposal and identified a number of issues in the response below.

The Site

The BT1 Gateway site is located at the boundary between the city centre and the west of the city. Physical constraints to the site include the 4 lane Inner City Ring Road which forms the western boundary of the site coupled with the poor environmental quality of the area and its immediate surroundings and contributes strongly to the disconnection between adjacent communities and the western edge of the city centre.

The existing car park on part of the site increases the site's effect as a barrier rather than acting as a connection to the city.

Successful development of this site will enable it to perform a critical function in connecting the city centre fringe to the outlying areas of the city.

In draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP) the site lies within the City Centre and the site is partially zoned as a City Centre Gateway. The site in its entirety is zoned as a Development Opportunity Site CC40.

The only Key Site Requirement provided by Draft BMAP Zoning CC40 Development Opportunity Site is to consult with Roads Service and agree access arrangements. The City Centre Gateway designation recognises this location as a key entrance point to the city centre which can present the visitor with an initial impression.

The site is located in the Scotch and Cathedral Quarters as designated in dBMAP. This designation outlines some specific criteria for this location:

- Development which fronts onto Carrick Hill... shall be set back 1.5 metres from the footway...
- On the key gateway sites at the intersection of North Street and Carrick Hill...building height shall be a minimum of 4 storeys and a maximum of 7 Storeys

Design Concept

Proposed Mix of Uses

The Council welcomes the concept to develop the BT1 Gateway site into an iconic, well recognised structure which forms a positive relationship with the surrounding area.

The proposed mixed use development will be compliant with the draft BMAP aims of providing a mix of uses on Development Opportunity Sites which promote vitality and viability in urban areas.

Further information should be provided on the type of hotel envisaged to operate on this site. Belfast Tourism: Gateway To The Future, the Council's integrated strategic framework to co-ordinate tourism development in Belfast in 2010 – 2014, was published in March 2011 and identifies a weakness in the City's offering of Boutique Hotels and apart-hotels. The city has experienced a number of hotel developments in recent year years and there are current developments to the south of the City Centre for hotel accommodation. Whilst hotel accommodation in the BT1 Gateway area of the City is currently poor consideration should be given to the type of hotel accommodation that will likely be in demand by the time construction has completed.

The proposed food store at ground floor will help meet the needs of adjacent communities and will promote increased footfall into the site, however the availability of undercroft parking has the potential to create congestion problems in this part of the city, especially considering the high volumes of traffic passing this site on a daily basis and the restricted nature of McKibbens Court and Kent Street.

With the expected move into the City Centre by the University of Ulster the proposed development of food store in this location will help meet the likely demands of over 12,000 students and staff coming in to this general area.

In the context of the new University of Ulster City Centre campus and the ongoing student-accommodation related pressures experienced in the city, in the event that the proposed mix of uses for this site were to be reconsidered it may be worth exploring the potential regenerative benefits that managed purpose built student accommodation could have in this location.

Scale, Massing and Design

The Council acknowledges the design approach which reflects the site's gateway designation in draft BMAP, however, the scale and massing of the proposal could have significant impacts on the existing residential uses along Kent Street and Stephen Street. It should be noted that the Gateway zoning in BMAP relates only to the southern half of the site and whilst the proposed design incorporates a reduced height along the Kent Street boundary greater consideration could be given to the potential negative impacts on existing

Kent Street properties in terms of overshadowing, loss of light and dominance.

The consultation document describes in detail the proposed façade however the language used is quite technical in nature and the drawings provided are conceptual in their form which may restrict opportunities for engagement from members of the public. Once the final design has been agreed upon, and in advance of submitting plans to DoE Planning, it may be useful to consider a public exhibition similar to the display for the DSD Library Square regeneration scheme held in Central Library.

Connectivity

The area in general suffers from varying degrees of dereliction which also impedes connectivity to and from the city centre. The Council welcomes the suitable redevelopment of the BT1 Gateway Site and the potential catalytic impact this can have on the wider area both in terms of physical regeneration and connectivity.

As referred to above and acknowledged in the consultation document the area around the gateway site suffers from poor pedestrian and cycling connectivity particularly in a westerly direction.

One of the key regeneration principles of the Northside Urban Regeneration Framework is 'improved connections from the city centre to adjoining residential neighbourhoods'. To help achieve this key theme and to encourage and enable greater pedestrian access in and out of the proposed development greater measures should be considered to ameliorate the impact of the road infrastructure to the west of the site. Rather than relying upon use of informal crossing points a more significant series of interventions which give greater priority to the pedestrian and cyclist should be explored in partnership with adjacent communities and DRD Roads Service.

Not only will greater pedestrian connectivity encourage movement into the site, it will also promote connectivity to the west of the site and will take advantage of potential tourism spend from those availing of the Hotel accommodation.

Conclusion

Belfast City Council welcomes the redevelopment of such a strategically important site for this part of the city.

The Council would encourage a suitable mix of uses on the site and would request that suitable market research is carried out to confirm which type of hotel provision is required and best suited to this area.

In the event that alternative uses for the development are explored the Council would highlight the current demand for purpose built student accommodation in the city that would relieve pressure from existing residential areas and will be in close proximity to main educational campuses.

Library Square

The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed Library Square Public Realm Scheme. This part of the City will experience a number of major investments in the coming years including the proposed Greater Belfast Development by the University of Ulster, Streets Ahead Phase III and the aforementioned BT1 Gateway proposal.

In this context the Library Square proposal is a welcome environmental improvement scheme in an area that has suffered in recent years from a lack of inward investment.

A key issue for this proposal will be to maximise the benefits of regeneration schemes in close proximity including the proposed Streets Ahead Phase III along with the expected Greater Belfast Development by University of Ulster and the nearby BT 1 Gateway.

In addition to these projects there is ongoing work lead by Belfast City Council on establishing Belfast as a Super-connected city. Belfast City Council has been awarded £13.7million by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport under its Super-connected Cities fund

The Super-connected Cities fund is a key project under the Investment Programme. Council has committed £3million towards this which will be further enhanced by the investment of over £8million by other funding sources making a total investment of nearly £25million.

Our vision is to become a world-class digital city and this award will provide Belfast with the digital infrastructure to make this vision a reality. This project has the full support of the Northern Ireland Executive, all the political parties within the Council and key stakeholders. Belfast as the capital city is the regional driver for Northern Ireland and this funding will further position the city and the region to compete in the global economy. This project includes upgrading the infrastructure and access by delivering:

- Next Generation Broadband access
- Ultrafast Digital Zones
- Fibre Micro-grants
- Metro Wireless

There may be some synergy to capitalise upon between the social connectivity and interactive media elements of the Library Square scheme and the super-connected city project.

The proposed temporary screen wall will contribute to the visual improvements in this location, however, a more permanent solution to this gap site should be sought as should integration with the proposed public bike hire scheme also lead by Belfast City Council.

Conclusion

Public realm schemes such as the proposed Library Square proposal are crucial elements of the wider regeneration of the City Centre and as such the Council welcomes this form of investment in key locations.

It is essential that the Department engages with relevant stakeholder, including Belfast City Council, to maximise the potential benefits of this scheme and ensure complementarity with adjacent regeneration activities.