



**Report to:** Development Committee

**Subject:** Belfast: Future City Conference 2014 – A vision for our city centre

**Date:** 19 August 2014

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>The Belfast City Masterplan identified the 'Centre City' as a spatial objective to create an accessible, vibrant and dynamic centre city driving the regional economy. In recognising that the core of the city centre is important to driving growth and investment in neighbourhoods, the Council approved the appointment of a consultant team (Urban Strategies (Joe Berridge), with Deloitte and ARUP) to develop a Belfast Core City Regeneration Framework and Investment Plan. This work should take a holistic approach to the delivery of regeneration within the City and should build upon existing policies and strategies, most notably the draft City Masterplan Review and the Council's Investment Strategy.</p>
1.2	<p>Urban Strategies, along with Deloitte and ARUP, as part of the consultant team, were appointed in March 2014 to establish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an aspirational strategic vision for Belfast's Centre City for the next 10 years, building upon and refreshing the existing policy framework; and</li> <li>- a delivery plan, learning from best practice examples to recommend models and processes that can be deployed to assist the delivery of the strategy, recognising the challenges that present themselves in attracting increased investment.</li> </ul>
1.3	<p>As Committee will be aware, the Belfast: Future City Conference took place on Friday 20 June in Belfast Waterfront Hall. This provided the forum for Urban Strategies to present their initial proposals for the city centre, focusing on '8 policies, 6 projects and 4 places'. The objectives for the conference were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To launch the initial findings of the core city regeneration and investment plan and test the direction of travel.</li> <li>- To agree key opportunities for growth for Belfast, particularly within</li> </ul>

	<p>the changing context of the return of regeneration and place-shaping powers to Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To launch and sign post the Council's process for community planning.</li> <li>- To provide a focus for practitioners to share experience and ideas for Belfast's city centre development and growth.</li> </ul>
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<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The conference hosted 223 attendees representing a range of anchor institutions, community, voluntary, a number of private sector organisations such as the banks and business parks, and public sector organisations (including key government departments such as the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), Department for Social Development (DSD), and Department for Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI)).
2.2	Professor Michael Parkinson chaired and moderated the event, reinforcing the role of Belfast as the regional driver and highlighting that for the city centre to be successful as the generator of growth for Belfast and the region, the city centre requires specific attention to address the critical issues of innovation, connectivity and quality of the environment which are essential to attract people. He emphasised that the City Centre Framework can provide the new narrative for action and delivery, with delivery being crucial.
2.3	Joe Berridge (Urban Strategies) outlined the proposals contained within the "Initial Directions" report, highlighting the deliverable opportunities to transform the city centre. This was designed to generate support and debate amongst participants to test the direction of travel being proposed by Urban Strategies. The policy proposals explored during the five parallel workshop sessions are outlined in Appendix 1.
2.4	The feedback from the workshop discussions demonstrated general support for the proposals as outlined by Urban Strategies. There was agreement that the city centre needed a distinctive draw that should be wider than retail and the need to attract more people, both young and old into the city centre. Support was also expressed for the Royal Exchange proposals to provide greater connection and links between Castlecourt and Victoria Square. The catalyst projects that would support regeneration of the city centre were considered to be Translink Hub, BBC relocation, National Gallery and the University of Ulster relocation.
2.5	In addition, the skill levels within the city need to be addressed to maximise inclusion, ensure that communities can avail of the opportunities created and to grow the economy. It was suggested that schools should be more actively engaged as well as higher and further education institutes.
2.6	While there was agreement that the city would benefit from a second major tourist attraction, there was debate as to whether the city needed a new venue attraction or more co-ordinated programming of activities and events - is it a 'Place' or 'Event' such as a festival? Suggestions were also made that the

	Ulster Museum should be included in the document and the need to ensure that the strategy also connected to the southside of the city.
2.7	In addition, the need to enhance connectivity and 'green' the city to make it a more pleasant and attractive environment was also discussed. There was also support for a city centre app that links tourism, retail, parking, walking routes etc.
2.8	A key message from the conference was the need to secure successful delivery of the proposals with realistic timescales and costs attached. This will require a clear city centre agenda which the framework will form the basis of and greater co-ordination and ownership of the city centre. It is also critical that the framework clearly connects the city centre to the surrounding areas to ensure that the benefits are felt by all communities. While this is a long term vision and plan for the city centre, it was emphasised that there are changes that can be made to improve the city centre in the short term, such as the 'greening' of the city centre and building on the city's success in hosting major events to attract more people of all ages into the city centre.
2.9	The Transformation Committee at its meeting in June 2014 also highlighted a number of key comments that have been forwarded to Urban Strategies. This included the need to expand the Belfast Rapid Transit system to include north and south Belfast; the need for an additional visitor attraction, on a scale similar to Titanic Belfast and to include the Shankill area within the tourism policy. In addition there were suggestions to ensure that the 'places' of opportunity that have been identified connect to the west of the city and the regeneration of the Great Victoria Street/Shaftesbury Square are to link Queen's University to the city centre through to the University of Ulster.
2.10	Following approval at the Transformation Committee on 26 June 2014, the Initial Directions report has been made available on the Council's website to encourage feedback and comment which the Council is relaying to Urban Strategies. The report is available at: <a href="http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/business/developmentplans/Regenerationandinvestmentplan.aspx">http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/business/developmentplans/Regenerationandinvestmentplan.aspx</a>
2.11	Members should also note that a specific session will be organised for all elected Members to discuss the proposals and direction of the final report with Urban Strategies at the end of August. This final report will form the basis of the Council's future land-use plan.
2.12	Media coverage of the event and response to the development and proposals for the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Framework has been positive. There have been reports in various newspapers and on radio, with interest continuing.
2.13	A video from the event is being finalised, and will also be made available on the Council's website. It will also be possible to include elements of the video on social media. In addition, delegates' views were recorded as vox pops during the event and these will also be made available through various communications platforms, once finalised. It is hoped that this will be used when the final report is agreed and launched in autumn 2014.

	<p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>The next steps to deliver the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Framework in September/October 2014 are as follows:</p> <p>2.14 - Urban Strategies are continuing to review and incorporate the feedback generated as a result of the conference to inform their final report.</p> <p>2.15 - Urban Strategies are completing further work to examine and develop investment and resource options to support the delivery of their proposals.</p> <p>2.16 - Urban Strategies will schedule a further engagement towards the end August/early September to discuss the report with Members and a number of key city stakeholders.</p> <p>2.17 - To support the delivery and resourcing of a final regeneration framework, Professor Michael Parkinson will also prepare an 'advocacy' document to provide up-to-date and comparable evidence to contextualise and demonstrate the importance of Belfast and the city centre for the region, as the location of new economic growth and as the focus of our image to the rest of the world.</p> <p>2.18 - As part of the development of an integrated regeneration plan for the city centre, particularly with the identification of the University of Ulster as a key project and area, Urban Strategies will also deliver a campus regeneration plan for the University of Ulster relocation. This will ensure that an integrated and holistic regeneration plan is developed for the city centre and will also ensure that the regeneration benefits of the university in the city are captured and connected to the needs of the surrounding communities. This approach may also inform the other proposed key projects identified in the city centre.</p> <p>2.19 - The key message from the conference is that delivery is critical and proposals will therefore be developed to establish a 'City Stakeholders Forum' to take this forward. Urban Strategies will be considering governance arrangements for delivery as part of their final report. This will require a review of potential delivery models and will need to align with other activities, such as the Council's community planning process, the engagement taking place with central government departments around the transfer of functions and key projects; the proposed Citywide Economic Forum emerging from the Integrated Economic Strategy; and the ongoing engagement of anchor institutions.</p> <p>2.20 <u>Future planning processes</u></p> <p>The framework is expected to address thematic challenges including, city centre living, repopulation, student housing and capturing the benefit of regeneration for the communities of Belfast. It will focus on securing economic growth, capturing benefits for residents, addressing quality of life issues and creating neighbourhoods of choice. This City Centre Framework will provide a basis for developing regeneration frameworks across other areas of Belfast and assist in the integrated development of the regeneration plan for the University of Ulster campus relocation, which will involve the surrounding communities, to support this process.</p>
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2.21	Initial discussions with Urban Strategies about developing local regeneration frameworks have proposed the need to focus on the areas surrounding the city centre in the first instance and the importance of ensuring that the process and level of engagement is appropriate to the nature of issues within areas. Given the importance of social, educational and economic issues within many areas it is therefore important that any area regeneration framework aligns with the Council's community plan and reflects the Council's approach to community planning at a local level which will include community engagement and agreement of area based outcomes. Members should note that a stakeholder event is planned for autumn 2014 which will outline the Council's approach to community planning and it is intended that this should link with the work of Urban Strategies.
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<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	The budget for this city centre conference event was met within the existing Development Department budget.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	Equality and Good Relations Considerations will be taken into account in all aspects of this work.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note the positive feedback from the conference and ongoing interest in the work of Urban Strategies.</li> <li>- Note and approve the proposed 'Next Steps' including a return visit from Joe Berridge and the work of Professor Michael Parkinson in supporting the importance of Belfast's role in the region.</li> <li>- Approve in principle the proposed approach for the development of future area-based plans for the city which will link to community planning process and agreed city and area based outcomes.</li> <li>- Note the stakeholder event to secure commitment for community planning that will be organised for September/October and the importance of integrating the work of Urban Strategies.</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
<p>Timeline:      October 2014                      Reporting Officer: John McGrillen</p>	

<b>7</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1: Summary of Belfast: Future City conference workshop themes	