



<b>Subject:</b>	Linen Quarter Public Realm Analysis and Vision: report on public consultation and amendments to finalised document
<b>Date:</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> May 2016
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<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update Members on the consultation process and responses received to the draft Linen Quarter Public Realm Analysis and Vision;</li><li>• Outline amendments made subsequent to full consultation and present the final draft of the Vision document for notation.</li></ul>
1.2	A summary of the consultation and engagement process undertaken is set out in <b>Appendix 1</b> . Organisations and individuals who responded are identified in <b>Appendix 2</b> . <b>Appendix 3</b> summarises responses to the consultation from those who completed the consultation questionnaire. The final draft of the Vision document is attached at <b>Appendix 4</b> .

2.0	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the comments received in response to the consultation exercise and the proposed amendments to the final draft of the Vision document summarised in section 3 of this report;</li> <li>• Note that the finalised draft version of the Linen Quarter Public Realm Analysis and Vision will be referred to Planning Committee for approval on 17<sup>th</sup> May.</li> </ul>
3.0	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) identifies the Transport Hub/South Centre as a Special Action Area (SAA), one of five such areas which are in need of a detailed and integrated planning approach. It was recognised that in these parts of the centre, a phased approach could be taken to preparing more intensive local plans to forward their regeneration in line with the larger ambitions of the Strategy.</p>
3.2	<p>In November 2016, the City Growth and Regeneration and Planning Committees considered draft Public Realm Analysis and Vision documents prepared for Linen Quarter and Western Quarter. It was agreed that a public consultation exercise would be undertaken for Linen Quarter and that more detailed economic intervention should be developed for Western Quarter prior to public consultation being undertaken for that area. A report on the form of proposed intervention to be developed for Western Quarter will be presented to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in June.</p>
3.3	<p>The Council's consultation and engagement process began on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2015 and closed on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016 and is summarised in <b>Appendix 1</b>. 68 consultation responses were received, the majority of which were positive about the Vision document, as explained in more detail below. 49 of these used the questionnaire format which was available for completion on-line or in Word format and the remaining 19 comprised letter and e mails. A clear majority of the questionnaire responses were positive, describing themselves as fully or mostly supportive of the various elements of the Vision document. This was also reflected in the other written responses received. A list of those respondents who identified themselves in set out in <b>Appendix 2</b>.</p>

3.4	<p><b>Key Issues</b></p> <p>The key issues raised through the consultations are summarised as follows:</p>
3.5	<p><b>Policy Context</b></p> <p>A number of respondents including DoE and DSD have requested that the finalised document more clearly cross-references the relevant Planning and Regeneration Policy context and that it clarifies its purpose with regard to how it will be used in Planning terms.</p> <p><b>Response:</b> appropriate changes will be made to the finalised document. These will reflect that it will not have determinative weight in planning terms but rather that it supports and complements existing planning policies that apply to the city and help shape its future direction.</p>
3.6	<p><b>Linen Quarter Boundaries</b></p> <p>There were queries about the boundaries chosen for the Vision document in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending it to match the Linen Conservation Area boundaries;</li> <li>• Extending to include the residential area on Alfred St around St Malachy’s Church;</li> <li>• Extending beyond Ormeau Avenue to Bankmore Street to include surface car parks.</li> </ul>
3.7	<p><b>Response:</b> The northern boundary of the Quarter is taken from that of the Transport Hub and South Centre SAA identified in BCCRIS. Alfred Street has been chosen as the eastern boundary because of the changes of scale and nature of the buildings to the east, towards the Markets. Great Victoria Street was chosen as the western boundary as it represents a logical edge to Linen Quarter in light of proposals being developed for the Transport Hub. It is not proposed to amend these boundaries. However, the importance of improving connectivity with neighbouring communities in the Donegall Pass, the Markets and Sandy Row is recognised and explained further in paragraphs 3.21 and 3.22. It is, however, proposed to extend the southern boundary to include the Ormeau Baths and Fermanagh House on the corner of Ormeau Avenue and Aspley Street given their age, and in the case of the Baths, the importance of framing views south along Linenhall Street. This proposed extension also incorporates the northern sections of Maryville Street and Aspley Street and recognises the important connections they provide to the neighbouring community in Donegall Pass.</p>
3.8	<p><b>Vision Objective 1: Enhance the Arrival Experience – Great Victoria Street</b></p> <p>The proposal was well-received though it was recognised that a significant amount of further technical work would be required to develop detailed proposals. There was one objection from a private individual to any attempt to close Amelia Street or move taxis from</p>

the rank there. Transport NI (TNI) commented that any changes to the public road network need to be carefully considered and where appropriate, traffic flows may have to be modelled, to ensure the overall efficiency of the city's transportation network is not unduly compromised. While supportive in principle of the upgrade the pedestrian crossing facilities on Great Victoria Street, including the provision of a "super crossing", at an appropriate location, they wish to see the identified crossing point removed from the indicative layout plan shown on page 53 of the document. Translink noted the importance of aligning any detailed proposals for this area with the preferred option for the Transport Hub as it emerges and were generally supportive of the proposal as illustrated. They would like to be involved in developing the vision into the detail for the Linen Quarter and the interfaces with surrounding areas

3.9 **Response:** The aspiration expressed to remove vehicular traffic from Amelia Street and Blackstaff Square other than for servicing will be retained in the finalised Vision document. However, it will be amended as appropriate to cross-reference the need for traffic modelling and the importance of the relationship with the Transport Hub as detailed proposals are developed. More detailed design proposals will be the subject of the necessary statutory planning consents and Traffic Regulation Orders. This will require further detailed public consultation to be undertaken as proposals emerge.

3.10 It is proposed to retain the identified crossing point shown in the indicative layout plan on page 53 of the document as it best reflects the Council's aspiration for the relationship between the proposed Transport Hub and the Linen Quarter so that it is better connected, will enhance the arrival experience in the city and will maximise the opportunity for regeneration on both sides of this part of Great Victoria Street and east through the Linen Quarter to the city centre. However, the final document will be amended as follows:

- on page 53, the illustrative layout will be amended to clarify that visual used shows an illustrative scenario;
- also on page 53, the last bullet on initial proposals will be amended to add "Any changes to the existing layout of Great Victoria Street would require further detailed analysis and be subject to financial support and alignment with Transport NI and other transportation plans. The illustrative scenario does not seek to provide the definitive solution".

3.11	<p><b><i>Vision Objective 2: Develop new Street Typologies</i></b></p> <p>This Objective attracted most comment and the most significant divergence of opinion between respondents ranging from those who wished so see most, if not all traffic and parking removed, to others who did not wish to lose any on-street parking and would like to see the number of disabled parking bays increased. TNI commented that the street hierarchy proposed is in keeping with the principles set out in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) and is therefore acceptable in principle.</p>
3.12	<p>Some S75 groups who responded argue that the proposal to create “shared surfaces” would only work effectively and safely if vehicles are restricted other than for servicing. RNIB and Guide Dogs representatives objected in the strongest terms to the “shared surface” proposals arguing that people who have experienced sight loss and those using guide dogs are placed at significant risk by proposals which remove kerbs which define the edge of carriageway from pavement.</p>
3.13	<p><b>Response:</b> The Vision document seeks to improve public realm, part of which is to make it more attractive to pedestrian footfall which includes reusing space currently utilised by cars. This issue is not unique to this area and follows the direction set by both central government as well as broader opinion. Vision Objective 2 seeks to bring a balanced approach to the street hierarchy in this area in the form of gradual change to reduce the levels of on-street parking and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The Council’s Car Parking Strategy, which is currently being developed, will be used to inform</p>
3.14	<p>decision-making alongside advice from Transport NI when considering any future public realm proposals being developed for Linen Quarter.</p> <p>Shared space has a variety of applications depending on the specific needs and requirements of individual streets and is not a “one size fits all” concept. However, the final document will be amended to better explain the concept of shared space, to remove references to continuous wall-to-wall paving and to clarify that detailed proposals will be developed in consultation with local users. It will cross reference with DRD’s Director of Engineering Memorandum (DEM 154/15): Kerb Heights in Public Realm Schemes which requires minimum kerb height of 60mm in public realm proposals.</p>
3.15	<p><b><i>Vision Objective 3: Create New Focal Spaces</i></b></p> <p>Proposals for improvements to the public realm in and around Blackstaff Square were widely supported. There were some concerns expressed around the difficulties associated</p>

	<p>with re-locating the taxi rank and, ultimately, the proposed closure of Amelia Street to traffic other than for servicing premises (see also the objection referred to in paragraph 3.9). There was one objection to any proposal to ultimately restrict traffic in Amelia Street and invest in improving Blackstaff Square. Many of the other comments received related to management, for example, with regard to the storage of commercial waste bins and their presentation for collection.</p>
3.16	<p>The proposal to create a new public square at Linenhall Street West when the BBC relocates, received more qualified support because it would result in the loss of on-street parking spaces. The BBC commented that they would like to be appraised of detailed designs for the new square as they are developed.</p>
3.17	<p><b>Response:</b> as with Great Victoria Street (paragraphs 3.8-3.10 above) the Vision document will be amended as appropriate to cross-reference the need for traffic modelling and the importance of the relationship with the Transport Hub as detailed proposals are developed for Blackstaff Square.</p>
3.18	<p>The design of Blackstaff Square focuses on establishing a cohesive space to be designed around the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. Whilst vehicles would not be removed from the square in their entirety it is hoped that this could be restricted for example, for servicing and emergency vehicles. This enables the creation of a square that can positively address all surrounding uses, encouraging spill and dwell whilst also creating a flexible central space that could be used for cultural events. It is proposed that rather than the central garden previously suggested, the square will be predominantly hard surfaced for flexibility</p>
3.19	<p>of use and durability with the introduction of new street trees, feature seating and lighting. This would align with the design narrative being developed in other squares in the city centre through DSD's Streets Ahead programme. Although beyond the scope of this document, consideration will be given to the issues relating to commercial waste storage and servicing requirements as detailed proposals for Blackstaff Square and its environs are developed.</p> <p>The Council will work closely with neighbouring landowners, in particular the BBC, on the future development of any proposals to develop a new, Linenhall Square. Any such proposals will need to follow the same process and engagement with statutory partners, neighbouring businesses and members of the public as that identified for Blackstaff Square in paragraphs 3.10 and 3.17 above.</p>

3.20	<p><b><i>Vision Objective 4: Make the Most of the Unique Building Stock</i></b>  <b><i>Vision Objective 5: Provide a Framework for New Buildings</i></b></p> <p>Comments received were generally supportive. Some issues raised were beyond the scope of the document for example, with respect to the suggested introduction of new uses such as residential properties and craft-related businesses. Some respondents also stated that the document should not be the sole source of guidance on new buildings or development beyond the public realm, and that the finalised document should clarify the extent to which it might be used in assessing the quality of design when determining planning applications in the area. With regard to the suggestion that the Council should establish a City Design Review, while welcomed, some respondents recommended that it link with the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on the Built Environment to avoid duplication.</p>
3.21	<p><b>Response:</b> Where the issues raised are beyond the scope of the document, it is not intended to amend the finalised version. The proposed amendments referred to in paragraph 3.6 above will ensure that clearly cross-references the relevant Planning and Regeneration Policy context and that it clarifies its purpose with regard to how it will be used in planning terms. This will also clarify the weight to be given to the document in planning decisions. Further consideration will be given to the membership of a City Design Review in the event that it is established.</p>
3.22	<p><b><i>Connections with Neighbouring Communities and Key Arrival Points</i></b></p> <p>Responses from community groups have asked that the Vision considers the desire lines, connections and future linkages to surrounding communities to the south and east and acknowledges them in the document. Various respondents have also noted that there are additional key arrival points to the Quarter other than those shown at Great Victoria Street/Amelia Street and Bedford Street/ Donegall Square South.</p>
3.23	<p><b>Response:</b> Appropriate changes will be made to the final document to seek to address these concerns. It will be amended to reflect the need to incorporate the principle of good connectivity with neighbouring communities. More specifically, the importance of improving linkages with the communities in Donegall Pass, the Markets and Sandy Row, designated by OFMDFM through its Urban Villages Initiative, will be recognised and incorporated.</p>
3.24	<p>In addition, a project is being undertaken by council officers to map physical development throughout the city. A key purpose of this project is to identify developments which may act</p>

as catalysts to create employment for persons most removed from the labour market. Physical developments may also create conditions for skills development and deliver wider social value impacts such as supply chain development. Recent local case-studies of social regeneration outputs elsewhere are the University of Ulster North Belfast Campus and Innovation Factory in West Belfast.

3.25 ***Animation of Spaces and Streets***

Some responses emphasised considering how the Linen Quarter might be used for the wider benefit of those who live and work in the city and emphasised that a physical, public realm programme plays only a small part in achieving this

3.26 **Response:** these comments raised issues beyond the scope of this document. However, they will be referred to the Council departments most directly involved in developing relevant programmes, for example, Tourism, Culture and Arts, who are involved in animating the city and bringing activity to the high quality, people-friendly streets and squares which the Linen Quarter Vision seeks to create.

3.27 **Equality and Good Relations Implications**

Equality and good relations screening was conducted in parallel with the proposed consultation processes. A full EQIA is not required.

3.28 **Finance and Resource Implications**

The cost of potential public realm/environmental improvement projects or economic intervention projects which may emerge, and which have potential implications for the City Centre Investment Fund, will be reported to a future Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.



<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	<p><b>Appendix 1:</b> Linen Quarter: Summary of Consultation and Engagement</p> <p><b>Appendix 2:</b> Linen Quarter Consultation Exercise: List of Respondents</p> <p><b>Appendix 3:</b> Linen Quarter Questionnaire: Summary of Questionnaire Responses</p> <p><b>Appendix 4:</b> The Linen Quarter – Vision and Guidance (finalised version subject to editorial and formatting changes as required for publication)</p>