

Appendix 1

Draft Belfast City Council Response to Greater Clarendon (Sailortown) Masterplan

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Greater Clarendon (Sailortown) Masterplan. In the response below we have set out some overarching comments in the context of the ongoing joined-up approach between the Department and the Council on issues relating to city centre regeneration followed by some specific comments on the draft masterplan.

Strategic Context

In preparation for the proposed extension of regeneration powers to councils as part of the local government reform process and recognising the opportunities emerging in the city at this time, Belfast City Council developed, in liaison with key partners including the Department for Social Development, the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (CCRIS).

The CCRIS provides a vision and strategic context for the future development and regeneration of Belfast City Centre for the next 10-15 years including enabling large scale developments to happen and harnessing the social benefits of such investment. The core principles which underpin the CCRIS include:

- Increase the employment population;
- Increase the residential population;
- Manage the retail offer;
- Maximise the tourism opportunity;
- Creation regional learning and innovation centres;
- Create a green, walkable, cyclable centre;
- Connect to the city around; and
- Shared space and social impact.

The Department for Social Development has recently adopted, in part, the CCRIS as its policy framework for the future regeneration of Belfast City Centre.

The related announcement made by the Social Development Minister, Lord Morrow MLA, reinforces the partnership approach being adopted in moving forward...

"a shared policy further strengthens this relationship and will now only serve to enhance both organisations in developing further initiatives which will provide a clearer vision on how the City can become even more attractive to major private sector investors and developers..."

“This joined up approach allows us to bring our expertise together to develop and form a shared vision on the best way forward for the regeneration and continued investment in the City of Belfast”..

As part of this joint approach to regeneration the Council were part of the Greater Clarendon (Sailortown) Masterplan project board and provided input throughout the process. We look forward to continuing this positive working relationship in order to capture investment and make a real difference to the lives of those who live and work in Belfast.

Comments on the draft Masterplan

The draft masterplan and its key aims are broadly in line with the aspirations of the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy, however, it would be beneficial to provide some more specific comments on the draft plan.

The Masterplan area encompasses a number of important areas within the city including the emerging City Quays development, Ulster University Campus, York Street Interchange and the numerous planned developments around York Street and Dunbar link as well as the historic Sailortown neighbourhood. It is important that the planned developments in these areas which include multi-story car parks, hotels, grade A offices and purpose built managed student accommodation integrate with the city centre and connect with existing communities. The council is therefore supportive of the proposals to improve this area including the public realm in order to better connect with the rest of the city.

The City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy identifies the Lagan Corridor as an important but underutilised part of the city and emphasises the need enhance connectivity to the river. On that basis it is important that the masterplan not only promotes the movement of people in a north/south direction but also east -west movement to and from the river frontage. The aspirations of the CCRIS and the identified Inner North place and Special Action area are also relevant in this regard.

The masterplan outlines that the Council is developing a car parking strategy however, this work has not yet been finalised or through Council committee processes as a result we would request that paragraph 2.64 is amended to reflect that as part of this work we will be considering how car parking operates in the city and giving some thought to how it could be rationalised and perhaps even some development opportunities realised in the context of agreement in either the reduction of spaces in certain parts of the city or where alternative provision can be made elsewhere in more suitable locations.

The draft masterplan outlines potential opportunities that will emerge once the York Street Interchange (YSI) is completed although there remains some uncertainty due to funding and timing. The masterplan should consider the impact on development opportunities if the YSI is further delayed and perhaps some thought should be given to a phasing of schemes at the city fringe and UU quarters in the first instance which will be less impacted by the Interchange.

The masterplan contains a robust analysis and baseline section however, it is important that the main masterplan recommendations are not lost within the quantity of material provided in the document, perhaps the final document could streamline the research and analysis sections as appropriate.

The masterplan recommendations include a number of uses for sites throughout the study area. It should be made clear that these illustrations are indicative and development proposals must be in accordance with BMAP and other relevant statutory planning policies which are the primary tools for Belfast City Council in undertaking its role as the planning authority.

Furthermore, retail uses suggested for some sites must be of an appropriate scale and nature for these locations. C1 and C2 are very large sites that sit outside the City Centre but the associated imagery might suggest high rise developments will be acceptable, this could impact expectations on land value and suggest densities that would inappropriately compete with the city centre and which may not be considered acceptable in planning terms.

The Council is currently working closely with DRD to identify the potential impact of the York Street Interchange on the sites in our ownership. Within the masterplan area council is also in ownership of the Corporation Square and Exchange Street car parks and we have on license from DRD the corporation street car park. The draft plan proposes office, retail, hotel, leisure and residential as potential uses for these sites. We note that this is not formal planning policy or guidance but we suggest that retaining the current use of car parking might actually be a practical use in future in some instances, depending on the Interchange and other adjacent developments.

The site identified as CF1 is also within Council's ownership which, as part of our ongoing estate management, we are considering the potential of and how it links to other land in this area and other planned developments. As suggested above the final wording should be suitably flexible to allow a variety of appropriate uses in this location.

The Key projects identified in the Masterplan are broadly in line with the aspirations of the Council's City Centre Strategy including encouraging more people to live in the city centre, improving the Dunbar link, the potential impact of a rail halt in this area, encouraging activity under the motorway flyovers and creating attractive squares and spaces. It is important that residential developments aim to provide balanced neighbourhoods that are well connected to the city centre and have access to important amenities. Improvements along the Dunbar link would help to minimise the severance impact that is prevalent in certain locations along the inner ring road. Council would be keen to work with the Department and Transport NI to help explore any opportunities that might arise in this regard.

Proposed uses for sites beneath the flyover including art installations; environmental improvements; better use of space such as recreation use; and improved linkages between areas are broadly in line with the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy although these must have due consideration where land is currently being utilised e.g as a surface level car park

The Council will welcome continued engagement with the department and other city stakeholders including involvement in the preparation of any future development framework or action plan for this area including consideration of how to best maximise the benefit of the high levels of development activity planned in this area. The Council also encourage engagement with the local communities through the formal consultation exercise currently underway in order to shape the final document

