

PREFACE

What is an urban design strategy?

An urban design strategy is a vital tool in the creation of attractive, healthy, vibrant and viable towns and town centres.

In this case it is a strategy for the centre of Derry/ Londonderry : **The Heart of the City.**

Such strategies are often **visionary**, showing how towns can and should evolve over time. In this sense they are outside the normal statutory planning framework as they are, in part, conceptual and have not gone through procedures such as public consultation or inquiry. However, some aspects of an urban design strategy can form **supplementary planning and design guidance** such as, say, development briefs for sites or matters of detailed design.

This strategy attempts both: it takes a wide and long term view of the sort of distinctive city centre that can be created, but also shows, in some detail, how design guidance can help achieve this. It aims to achieve an environment vibrant and animated, reflecting the new ideas on urbanism and the cultural importance of city centres being seen throughout Europe.



This strategic urban design project has emerged from the 'City Vision 2020 First Plan for Progress' published in 2000. Among the wealth of ideas springing out of this highly integrated exercise was the proposal to commission an urban design master plan for the Heart of the City. This strategy is the outcome of this idea.

In parallel with the Urban Design Strategy Study, Derry City Council has published a Draft Cultural Strategy. A main theme is that the City is reclaimed and promoted as 'the Cultural City'. The strategy sets out a wide range of actions the city council should undertake to achieve the vision of a greatly enhanced urban culture. Relevant to the urban design strategy are proposals to:

- n bring the river and riverside into greater use;
- n create a 'Big Idea' or 'beacon project' in the short term preferably on the riverside;
- n establish the city centre as a cultural quarter;
- n connect cityside and waterside with a signature bridge;
- n embrace neighbourhood provision;
- n enhance parks and open spaces as cultural places.

The cultural strategy is supportive of and complementary to the urban design strategy and is greatly to be welcomed.



This urban design strategy for the Heart of the City of Derry/Londonderry, is called, more formally, the **Integrated Urban Design Strategic Framework** (IUDSF). This implies that it looks wider than environmental and design issues and should take into account other matters such as the economic context, the property market, the planning background social and cultural issues and all aspects of movement. This is to say, it is an **'integrated strategy'**.

The IUDSF also calls for a longer term framework than a local plan might address. In this case, in view of the very considerable challenges and potential changes in the central area, a period of two or more decades might be appropriate. This calls for a **'strategic framework'**.

Such a framework needs to be visionary, exciting the interest of the community, yet achievable and flexible in the eyes of politicians and developers. This is a difficult balance but is facilitated by a timescale in which a great deal can be achieved.

The renaissance of declining port cities such as Bilbao or Barcelona is well documented. But we can also look at what has been achieved in UK cities with the help of Lottery money or European grants in the hands of local champions. Cities such as Durham, Chester, York, Newcastle and Manchester have been revitalised and changed their image. Great things have been achieved and can be achieved just as successfully in Derry.

City Vision recognised the need to look broadly and comprehensively at the direction in which the city centre should best evolve, ensuring that opportunities are not exploited on a piecemeal basis but are always seen in the wider context. The need to raise the standard of design has also been recognised. The need to reintegrate the city with its river has been expressed in many quarters. The desire to integrate the two sides of the river is strongly felt.

In addition, the release of two major security sites for development, Fort George and, soon, Ebrington Barracks, compound the urgency to see how the centre should grow and evolve. These are decisions of profound importance: literally 'once in a lifetime' opportunities. Including other opportunities, such as Queen's Quay, over 50 acres of central area land could be available for community and commercial uses. The potential is enormous. The need to get the right answers imperative.

This strategy aims to achieve this. It is a framework and not prescriptive in its approach. Inevitably there must be flexibility and the strategy must not depend on any single element which may not be realised. We hope it is challenging and thought-provoking and provides a basis for discussion on the best way forward.

Part One sets out 'A Vision for the Heart of the City' outlining what the main building blocks could comprise over the next twenty years. A more detailed explanation of the reasoning behind the Urban Design Strategy follows.

INTRODUCTION

The North West Development Office commissioned Atkins to produce this study following a proposal in the City Vision initiative to establish an Integrated Urban Design Strategic Framework for 'The Heart of the City'. Atkins was assisted by the economist John Simpson in the economic evaluation of the strategy. The Framework is aimed to "facilitate and inform the future detailed master planning/ urban design of key development sites and the design of individual buildings and public spaces to achieve the vision."

Four aspirations in the City Vision 2020 are for a city that:

- n is peaceful and safe for all citizens;
- n has a status in the island of Ireland that is commensurate with the pride already felt by the people;
- n provides varied, well paid employment opportunities;
- n has a high quality environment to enhance the wellbeing of all, and to attract employers and visitors.

The NWDO sees the urban design strategy as an essential, initial step in achieving these four aspirations. In particular, the strategy needs to address:

- n the physical transformation of the city centre to reflect its economic status and profile as a regional hub within the island;
- n the integration of the centre as a whole encouraging all people to move safely and with pride within it;
- n the integration of the city centre with its river following the severance caused by road developments, car parking and development along the riversides;
- n the reinforcement and enhancement of urban character and identity.

In addition to these wide issues the strategy needs to address the development opportunities presented by three major sites:

- n Fort George;
- n Ebrington Barracks;
- n Queen's Quay.

The strategy is required 'to establish compatible identities and uses for these areas' and 'to ensure an urban design led approach' to their redevelopment. The success of this aspect of the strategy is crucial to the future of the city.

The commission sets out a series of urban design objectives which the strategy needs to address for the Heart of the City as a whole. These include:

- n character;
- n continuity and enclosure;
- n quality of the public realm;
- n land use;
- n ease of movement;
- n accessibility;
- n legibility;
- n adaptability;
- n diversity;
- n sustainable development.

It has been the aim of the strategy in its evolution to address all these criteria in all of the components that it comprises.

This report on strategy follows a Stage One Report addressing;

- n the planning context particularly for the key development sites;
- n the historical development of the city centre;
- n the Character Areas comprising 'The Heart of the City'.

The present report sets out the strategy in four parts:

- n Part One : Urban Design Vision;
- n Part Two : The Strategy;
- n Part Three : Design Guidance;
- n Part Four : Growing the Local Economy