



chapter  
Six

summary



Belfast is a City with immense opportunity ahead of it and it is already beginning to seize this. The constraints of the past 35 years are dissolving and this brings a renewed sense of optimism about its future as a destination within Europe and wider afield.

The consultants involved in the preparation of this study have been genuinely impressed with the quality and integrity of the built environment in the City Centre, as a foundation around which a new public realm can be successfully delivered. The City has an infinite variability of spaces ranging from small intimate streets to the grandeur of Donegall Square. One of the most impressive characteristics that has emerged from this study is the compactness of the City Centre, when compared with other cities. This is a huge advantage, as it offers the potential to create a City Centre that is truly walkable. It also introduces a great challenge too as this is not a cultural activity that has been readily enjoyed in Belfast for the past 3 decades. The process of regeneration in the City, along with the enhancement of the public realm, must invite the City's people to engage with their environment once again. It is undoubtedly an experience which can be enjoyed.

This Masterplan sets out a vision for better City, one with an interconnected network of high quality streets and spaces and a thriving economic and social ecosystem which grows from it. A good public transport system is an integral part of this vision, to feed through and around the core of the City.

The vision is founded on two strategies, one which is based on organic growth of the public realm from the heart of the City and the second which endeavours to instigate regeneration by creating hot spots of activity across the City. This is the Unified Strategy and Catalyst Strategy, respectively. The Masterplan is not intended to design the solutions for these strategies but instead attempts to highlight the opportunities that exist in certain locations, and to provide the justification and encouragement for further investment in them. The Department for Social Development is initiating the process of renewal through its investment in the Phase 1 projects, which includes an international design competition for Donegall Square, the 'jewel in the crown'. However, it is anticipated that the private sector will also play a key role in rolling out the public realm regeneration strategies, as evidenced by the Victoria Square development, and emerging masterplans for the North East and North West Quarters.

The City must realise that it is in the early stages of a period of enormous change. Of great importance at this critical point in its development is the need for visionary thinking and response. The fact that it has not been subject to the volume of poorer quality development throughout the seventies and eighties, which blighted many other city centres in Great Britain at that time, is fortunate as it means that the City Centre has a strong architectural pedigree, which enriches its form and character and adds to its attractiveness. Contemporary development must respect and add to this quality.

The Public Realm Project must also compliment the City's heritage and bring it to life. The present public realm is generally poor in terms of its appropriateness and quality. The tendency towards fashionable solutions needs to be carefully considered in the detailed design which follows this study. The public realm must provide a solution which is exciting, revitalising and energetic. It must also look as good in 20 or indeed 50 years time as it does on the day it is built. If that is achieved, then the investment is worthwhile. It is a challenging project in that sense and will require substantial consultation with and commitment from a wide range of people if it is to be built and maintained successfully.

Public realm can regenerate cities and it can improve the lives of people of who live and work there. It can also be a reason for people to visit a city. It is at the core of sustainability, as it underpins economic regeneration, generates environmental wealth and creates opportunities for positive social interaction. Belfast can benefit on all these counts.



# acknowledgements

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