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Department for Social Development
Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate
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Our ref: WESL1016/TH/HL

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Dear Sirs

**BELFAST CITY CENTRE NORTH WEST QUARTER PART 2
BASELINE REGENERATION ISSUES REPORT PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

We have been requested to respond to the above consultation document on behalf of our clients Westfield Shoppingtowns Ltd ('Westfield').

Context

As you will of course be aware, Westfield (together with their joint venture partners Hermes) are owners of CastleCourt Shopping Centre and as such are major stakeholders within the North West Quarter Area. Westfield's response to the Department's Development Brief for the North West Quarter (Part 1) area emphasised their desire to bring forward retail led mixed use regeneration there as soon as possible and this represents a continuing objective, notwithstanding the Department's selection of 'Royal Exchange' within the North East Quarter as their preferred retail scheme in terms of development sequencing.

Westfield note that when announcing the decision on North East Quarter, the Minister indicated that further consideration would be given to the way forward for the regeneration of the Part 1 area and associated timescale but understand that no further progress has been made in this regard .

Response

Much of the consultation document (the 'Baseline Report') represents an outline of the key regeneration issues which face the wider North West Quarter area. It is evident from the facts presented that there are major social and economic issues which need to be tackled.

Westfield would not dispute this baseline – they consider indeed that this emphasises the need for early action to secure maximum integration with the city centre core.

As a result, the Department must give very careful consideration to the role and timing of the regeneration of the Part 1 area of North West Quarter as the catalyst for regeneration of the remainder – particularly given the Ministerial comments at the launch of the current initiative which identified proximity to the retail core as the principal feature in the regeneration process.

It must be recognised, in particular, that the Royal Exchange scheme, if deliverable, would (as is expressly recognised at Para 1.19 of the Baseline Report) focus on linkages with the existing main shopping area and with Cathedral Quarter/Laganside as opposed to the disadvantaged City Centre Fringe Area which is now recognised to require urgent attention.

In contrast, the retail development of the North West Quarter Part 1 area has the potential to directly address the 'blocking' effect of Castlecourt which is identified as a keynote consideration in the Belfast Regeneration Strategy and which on any logical analysis is a pre-condition to harnessing the 'proximity' benefits highlighted by the Minister.

Westfield's proposals for Part 1 were advanced in full recognition of this requirement and were designed to maximise connectivity to the remainder of the Quarter – not only via the opening up of routes through the existing CastleCourt centre and the establishment of new streets beyond but also via the total transformation of North Street and the provision of a major public square there.

The primary importance of the core area within the wider regeneration process is recognised to some degree within the Baseline Report (for example within the assessment set out under the 'design' heading at Paras 10.6 – 10.10) but the relevance of this analysis is significantly diminished by a total failure to translate this importance into deliverable actions.

The key failure of the document therefore is the absence of any consideration of the plan and programme for the Part 1 area under the priority actions head at Chapter 12.

We would respectfully remind the Department that their commitment when embarking on a two stage masterplan process was to **integrate** the physical, social and economic regeneration of the **entire** North West Quarter area.

Unless the subsequent Part 2 masterplan properly explores this integration issue in the context of establishing a way forward and timescale for Part 1 this will be a recipe for disappointment and disaffection amongst the many stakeholders who will no doubt wish to invest time, energy and resources in the Part 2 process.

In conclusion, it is extremely difficult to see how the Department can realise its overall vision for North West Quarter without the active promotion of major retail led regeneration via Part 1 in order to secure its early delivery. Plainly, there is a need for a holistic approach if the potential benefit to adjoining residential communities in North and West Belfast – to which the Department clearly attributes significant importance – is not to be lost.

Our clients would welcome further dialogue on these matters as masterplan process progresses.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trevor Hollinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Trevor Hollinger
Director

c.c. Matthew Griffiths Esq – Westfield
Peter Miller Esq – Westfield