

From the Office of the Minister



Department of

**Enterprise, Trade  
and Investment**

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**Our Ref: DETI COR 215/2008**

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15<sup>th</sup> September 2008

*Dear Margaret,*

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2008 alerting me to the publication of the Belfast City Centre Westside Regeneration District Draft Regeneration Plan and enclosing an advance copy.

The proposals are indeed ambitious. I have asked relevant officials to consider the Draft Masterplan. I was particularly pleased to learn that officials from the NI Tourist Board (NITB) have been involved in the development of the Plan. This has ensured that the interests of tourism have been taken on board.

NITB's comments are attached, along with those of Invest NI. I hope you will find these helpful. I have asked Invest NI officials to engage with DSD counterparts on the points of clarification sought within their response.

I look forward to hearing of progress in due course.

*Sincerely,*

**ARLENE FOSTER MLA**

## **NITB Comment**

- NITB has been involved in developing these plans and met directly with the team appointed to develop the plans to ensure the tourism needs were captured.
- NITB agrees with the guiding development principles outlined on page 8, in particular, character preservation – reinforcing distinctiveness and identity, sense of place, mixed used development (including round the clock vitality), promoting independent retailers, better linkages to the rest of the city and beyond, as well as quality public spaces.
- NITB agrees to the broad areas outlined in the preferred concept Masterplan and, in particular, welcomes the additional 22,928 sqm for retail /café use and 280 hotel bedrooms.
- In 2006, Northern Ireland attracted over 2 million out of state visitors, spending £371 million in the local economy. Domestic holiday makers spent an additional £139 million. According to NITB's Regional / Local Authority Tourism Estimates 2006, Belfast received 25% of all out of state and domestic trips (792 800) and 29% of the total visitor spend (£141.4 million). Belfast City Council's Tourism Facts and Figures 2006 gives an overview of all visits to Belfast, including day trippers. In 2006, this figure was 6.8 million visitors, spending £324.1 million in the city and supporting almost 18,000 full time jobs. Given Belfast's current performance and trends for the future, Belfast requires additional hotel stock and also more retail / entertainment opportunities.
- NITB also welcomes the following areas:
  - a. The emphasis on high quality independent retail – Northern Ireland visitors seek retail opportunities and we would encourage craft / local produce outlets and high value add goods, recognizing that there is already a product base (although limited) within the Fountain Centre. This should be extended;
  - b. Building upon the Belfast Streets Ahead programme;
  - c. High quality public realm and pedestrian areas. In particular, we would flag the opportunity to animate these areas through public art and public events (within the consultation process, we also highlighted the opportunity for high quality market stalls) and

d. An emphasis on Streets and Squares – reinforcing a sense of place throughout the city.

- NITB is currently working in partnership with Belfast City Council to develop an integrated Tourism Strategy for Belfast. It is important that government departments continue to work collectively to develop Belfast, and we will be keen to involve Department of Social Development in this so as to capture not only the Westside Regeneration District Plan but also North West Quarter, Royal Exchange Regeneration Project and the Crumlin Road Gaol proposals and how tourism can benefit. As we develop this plan, we will also be better advised to comment on the type/grading of hotel provision required in Belfast.
- Finally, it is worth mentioning that NITB financially supports (in partnership with Belfast City Council) the Belfast Welcome Centre (BWC) as the main Gateway Tourist Information Centre for Northern Ireland. It is located at 47 Donegall Place, and is actually located within the zoned area of the West Side Regeneration District. BWC receives over one million visitors on foot per annum, including being a key drop off point for cruise trip groups. BWC lease is due for renewal in 2010, and they are currently situated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. They are seeking ground floor location. It may be useful to have direct discussions with the BWC on any potential ground floor sites facing Donegall Place/ Wellington Place, as well as to understand any other potential locations they are considering, as there are implications for a number of the city squares, to ensure linkages to this important orientation point. The contact details are Mary – Jo McCanny, 028 9023 9026 email [MaryJo@belfastvisitor.com](mailto:MaryJo@belfastvisitor.com)

### **Invest NI Comment**

- Invest NI broadly welcomes the proposals for the area, noting the important role they will play in regenerating the area through the creation of sites for a range of uses, including office/employment/industry.
- Invest NI would seek clarification from DSD on how the South West Quarter Master Plan will fit within the city centre proposals (including those for the area) as detailed in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.
- Invest NI welcomes the comments on Page 5 that a specific objective of the proposed scheme will be to provide a mix of uses, which will include office. It would seek to ensure as wide a range of business activities could be carried out in these areas, to ensure both their long term sustainability and vitality.
- Invest NI notes the comments on Page 7 regarding land banking and the creation of derelict/vacant sites and those on Page 9 regarding using parts of the Quarter which have remained derelict or unused for many years. Invest NI welcomes the identification of small brown field and development opportunity sites, as they can provide sustainable employment opportunities which may stimulate industrial and economic growth within an area.
- Invest NI notes the intention of proposed redevelopment of the South West Quarter to create circa 23,803sq m of office/business use in the area. It would be helpful to know whether or not this figure includes, or is in addition to, existing provision in the area.