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29th September 2008

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Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate
Department for Social Development
Lesley House, 2nd Floor
25-27 Wellington Place
Belfast, BT1 6GD

Dear Sir/Madam

**Comments on Draft Regeneration Plan for
West Side Regeneration District**

We are Architects and Surveyors who have carried out a number of refurbishments on Castle Street and Queen Street.

We note one of the specific objectives so the scheme is to "Respect and where possible reinstate the historic street patterns."

The proposed new route connecting Fountain Lane with the northern end of Queen Street is surely a dilution of the historic street pattern and will inevitably reduce footfall on the eastern end of Castle Street and on College Street.

The new route will also significantly increase the number of retail units in the area. This would be a good thing if saturation of retail space had been reached, but this is not the case and without a significant increase in demand, there will be an increase in vacancies in existing retail space.

Finally, subdivision of one of the major city blocks in the area will reduce the opportunity for the provision of semi-private amenity space for residential developments in the area.

Surely, in order to create sustainable residential accommodation, we should look to cities such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Berlin for examples of successful courtyard development.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours faithfully



Blamphin + Associates

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25-27 Wellington Place
Belfast, BT1 6GD

Dear Sir/Madam

**Comments on Draft Regeneration Plan
West Side Regeneration District (Castle Street/Fountain Street Area)**

We represent Mr P Blakely, owner and occupier of Nrs 41-49 Queen Street. We have recently submitted a planning application for the construction of a new mixed-use development replacing the existing building.

The existing building contains fragmented retail space with poor street frontage and three upper floors currently unusable for anything but light storage. This is due to inadequate access and escape provision and lightweight, deteriorated and un-fireproofed structure. The building is also suffering from subsidence as confirmed by RPS Structural Engineers. The new development will provide 627sqm of contemporary retail space with excellent frontage, 69 1, 2 & 3 bedroom apartments with 35 parking spaces and a landscaped private courtyard.

The decision to demolish and replace was not taken lightly but after consideration, the only way to create a development using the original building which would be structurally sound and compliant with Building Regulations, would be by façade retention. This solution would create 50% fewer residential units and retain the compromised retail street frontage. There would also be no on site parking, which, whilst not essential for budget accommodation, is expected with the higher quality owner occupied apartments proposed, which is the aim of the Regeneration Plan. This was why the decision was made to propose demolitions and the construction of a new building, purpose designed, without compromise, to provide high quality residential and retail space.

The design which has been presented to the Planning Service for approval meets all the specific objectives of the West Side Regeneration Plan.

The development is mixed use and residentially lead. 69 new households, incorporating largely 2 & 3 bedroom units would make a significant positive difference to the character of the area and its economic prosperity. The retail space is significantly better and larger than the existing building could ever provide.

In overall size and detail the building is within the scale of the area. It reinforces its street frontages and its corner feature creates a sense of place at the Queen

Street/College Street crossing. Much of the detail design has been informed by the existing building and indeed the existing corner doorway would be preserved and incorporated into one of the entrances to the apartment accommodation. An image of the proposal is enclosed.

What is perhaps most significant is that this development is proposed and lead by an owner occupier who, as owner of the Athletic Stores, has had a lifelong engagement with this part of the city and a genuine desire to see it improve.

It is with disappointment that we note on page 9 of the draft report that Nrs 41-49 Queen Street are not identified as a development opportunity. Indeed we are highly concerned that paragraph 13 on page 9 and the Preferred Concept Masterplan on page 16 indicates that Nrs 41-49 should be refurbished.

We completely understand that the Draft Report cannot look at individual buildings, but we have to maintain that the assumption in favour of retention, in this case, is based on a lack of information. Both Mr Blakely and ourselves have complete confidence in the proposed building which is being tested and subjected to the full rigours of the Planning Application process. We would however ask that your report does not identify Nrs 41-49 Queen Street as a key refurbishment opportunity but rather a key **regeneration** opportunity.

I hope these comments are helpful and informative and trust that they can contribute to the best possible proposals for the regeneration of one of the most attractive parts of the city centre.

Yours faithfully



Blamphin + Associates

Enc.

Copy to: Mr P Blakely
Mr M Worthington – Pragma Planning



RETAIL / APARTMENT DEVELOPMENT
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