

**Aischothú ar Lár Chathrach Bhéal Feirste
Ceantar Athghiniúna an Iarthair
Dréachtphleán Athghiniúna
Ag cruthú toadhcháí úr do cheantar Sráid an Chaisléan/An Fuaráin**

**Response to Belfast City Centre
West Side Regeneration District
Draft Regeneration Plan
Creating a new future for CastleStreet/Fountain Street.**

Reamhrá/Introduction.

Forbairt Feirste was established in 1994 to “promote our cultural heritage through economic regeneration”. The organisation’s main aim is “the creation of economic opportunities for Belfast’s Irish speaking community.”

The particular piece of our overall current work programme that we would like to focus on in relation to our submission re the West Side Regeneration District is the Gaeltacht Quarter initiative.

There has long been an organic cluster of Irish Language organisations and enterprises on a stretch of the Falls Road which is the main arterial route through the West of the City.

In 2002 Sir Reg Empey the then Minister for Enterprise Trade and investment established a West Belfast Task Force jointly chaired by John Simpson and Pdraig Whyte to look at measures to tackle the multi-faceted deprivation and urban disadvantage which effects West Belfast. One of the key recommendations of the Board was for the establishment of a designated Gaeltacht Quarter with the Irish Language at its heart and with its physical hub on the Falls Road.

On foot of this recommendation Forbairt Feirste was tasked with taking forward this proposal in conjunction with statutory bodies headed by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure.

A report on the establishment of a Gaeltacht Quarter Board governance and related issues was commissioned by DCAL/DSD and DETI and was published as the Dutton Report in December 2004.

**Síniú Cheantar Staideár Cheathrú Iardhesiceart Bhéal Feirste/Extension of the
Belfast South West Quarter Study Area.**

The area indicated in the Draft Strategy (page 4) should in our view be extended to incorporate the entire Bank Square area. This would simply involve the extension of the boundary along Berry Street to Royal Avenue thus including the remanant of Berry Street, Bank Place and Bank Square within the scope of the study. Similarly the Western boundary should in our view be extended from College Avenue along Millfield to its junction with Francis Street and continuing on to its intersection with Berry Street

Bank Square offers a number of exciting opportunities for sympathetically developing the character of the Gateway to the Gaeltacht Quarter as it includes the Bank Square, a number of Licensed premises which currently have strong connections to the Irish Language community as well as being adjacent to St Mary's Church which hosts Irish language weekly services.

Síneirgíochtaí féideartha leis an Cheathrú Ghaeltachta/Possible Synergies with Gaeltacht Quarter.

As noted in the Dutton Report 2004, the development of a designated Gaeltacht Quarter with the Irish Language at its heart and with its physical hub on the Falls, offered "An Unique Opportunity to transform an area of multiple deprivation and urban decay and to release the potential of the Irish language to the benefit of the all the citizens of Belfast."

Linking this initiative and maximising possible synergies with the Fountain Square Bank Square developments and the Gaeltacht Quarter would, in our view, bring added benefits to both initiatives.

The study area itself as noted in the Draft Report (Page 9) is a 'Gateway to the Gaeltacht Quarter' and accentuating the historical connections of the study area with the history of the Irish Language in Belfast as well as developing physical and other linkages between the two would in our view offer an excellent opportunity to "widen the tourism offer... in recognition of Castle Street's location as a Gateway to the Gaeltacht Quarter and West Belfast" (Page 9). As well as meeting the aim of putting "in place appropriate connections with Royal Avenue and West Belfast" (page 4) and "maximise connectivity north and west to the adjoining residential neighbourhoods" (page 4).

Roinnt pointí le meabhrú/Some issues for consideration

Whilst not being exclusive at this stage we would ask that the following points be taken into consideration as the consultation and development are taken forward:

- The plan, given the area's close proximity to the Gaeltacht Quarter and its position as a Gateway to the Quarter, should reflect and harmonise in some way with the ongoing plans to develop the Gaeltacht Quarter.
- Forbairt Feirste should be included in the list of Key Stakeholders for further consultation

Aischothú Fhorbairt Feirste ar Chomhairliúchán Dhréacht Ollphleán Choincepa RFS/ Forbairt Feirste response to DSD Draft Concept Master Plan Consultation. 25/9/08. Teagmháil/Contact jake@forbairtfeirste.com

- The lead in Bank Square initiative should be incorporated into the overall South West Quarter Master plan as it emerges and any lead in work should take account of the relevant issues raised in this submission.
- That the area where St. Mary's church, Kelly's cellars and other historical buildings, known as 'Bank Square', is included in the scope of the plan. The history of the area, its buildings and people and their role in the Irish Language community of Belfast, should be reflected in the proposed regeneration scheme.
- That a signage scheme, including bilingual signage, is included in the proposals for the regeneration of the area and that this is integrated into the citywide signage schemes thus enhancing connectivity between the City Centre and all Quarters of the City.
- That a series of bilingual information points/boards flagging up issues and areas of historical importance, including reference to the Irish Language be erected at appropriate points throughout the Study area.
- That the development of public art pieces reflecting the character and history of this Gateway to the Gaeltacht Quarter form a part of the Master Plan
- That easier access to and from West Belfast to the SWQ is incorporated into the proposals, perhaps through Walkways being developed, again in conjunction with the plans for the Gaeltacht Quarter and the Farset Way proposals.

Crích/End