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Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge

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

8th September

Dear Sir or Madam,

I enclose the Linen Hall Library's response to the *West Side Regeneration District Draft Regeneration Plan*.

Yours sincerely,

John Gray
Librarian

17 Donegall Square North
 Belfast BT1 5GB Northern Ireland

John Gray BA DLIS Librarian

reg charity no: XN45679

t: 0044 (0)28 9032 1707

f: 0044 (0)28 9043 8586

e: info@linenhall.com

w: www.linenhall.com

vat reg no: 252 3694 57

**Belfast City Centre
West Side Regeneration District
Draft Regeneration Plan**

Response by Linen Hall Library

The Library broadly welcomes the plan.

It agrees that the distinctive character of the area has 'been eroded by piecemeal developments of varying quality and style' and by 'landbanking' leading to 'a number of prominent derelict or cleared sites (p.7).

The area has also suffered because of the much higher emphasis given to larger shopping centres such as Castlecourt and the Victoria Centre.

The Library agrees that the future potential of the SWQ lies as 'a vibrant mixed use quarter' (p.8), but believes that this can be more meaningfully defined.

Lack of distinctive definition is well exemplified by confusion in this report about even the designation of the zone which is described on the front cover and at most other points as the 'West Side Regeneration District', while section 3 is headed 'South West Quarter'. Which is it?

1. Key issues

The Library agrees in particular with two of these as cited at p.9;

- The identification of the College Street/ Fountain Street as a potential 'hub for specialist and boutique shops, as well as the potential expansion and enhancement of the area's café and restaurant offer'.
- 'Retention of as many of the historically significant buildings as considered to be important' and including preservation/ conversion of semi-derelict warehouses.

2. The Linen Hall Library

We note the specific reference to the ground floor of the Library at p.10 where 'restoration' is suggested. This ground floor area has been in retail occupation since at least from the beginning of the 20th century. New tenants have introduced shop frontages, which while still less than ideal, are more in keeping with the building than previous ones.

It is difficult to see how far full restoration could be pursued in the context of the existing planning framework, unless the Linen Hall Library itself embarks on a major redevelopment, including re-occupation of the ground floor with the very major costs involved. These would include capital costs for building and purchasing back leases from tenants, and recurrent costs in loss of rental revenue from tenants and increased running costs for extended premises. This could not be achieved without very significant public funding support.