

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

August 13, 2008

Dear Sir/ Madam,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this consultation paper.
We understand that this is a draft plan and comment accordingly.

The Guiding Development Principles

In theory, we support the principles expressed in the Development Proposal and in particular advocate the sensitive refurbishment and reuse of existing buildings in the area in line with the principles of sustainable development. We do so under the presumption that refurbishment will be of a high standard and sensitive nature.

One of our major concerns would be in relation to planned redevelopment. We would hope that DoE Planning Service will be encouraged to undertake a detailed Conservation Area Appraisal of this part of the City Centre *prior* to more detailed plans being drawn up as it is essential that the "character of the area" and its "distinctiveness and identity" is properly assessed and defined. An exemplary conservation



and design-led process as well as outcome should be sought, which can then inform regeneration schemes in protected areas elsewhere. All new buildings should not only "respond to" the existing fabric, but designs should seek to respect the scale, style and character of neighbouring buildings. We would hope that designs will be of the highest quality and suitably sensitive to the built environment.

The emphasis on better 'enclosure' perhaps discounts the idea that the variation in scale and form adds to the distinctive character of the streetscape, rather than detracting from it. We feel that the traditional pattern and outline of the street should be carefully considered.

The Concept Masterplan

We understand that the plan is intended to act as a framework or guide but strongly advise that all buildings hereto excluded from the scheme remain so. We are particularly keen to ensure that the red brick industrial buildings are retained and re-used and would alert you to the existence of a planning application which involves the demolition of the fine warehouse at 41-49 Queen Street, highlighted 'as a key refurbishment opportunity' in the document.

We support the proposed creation of pedestrian priority areas and the reduction of traffic in the area. In order to achieve this careful planning to re-route the traffic would be required, but we believe this is achievable and necessary. This would be better facilitated if car-parking was located at the edge of the zone rather than within it however, thereby encouraging traffic to circulate and remain on the periphery rather than encouraging it into the area. This would also help to establish pedestrian routes through the district and links to other quarters.



With regards to the proposed 'blocking up of back alleys', we trust that the issue of potential anti-social behaviour would be properly assessed before such a strategy was applied. We would suggest that these could provide useful access points, particularly where efforts are made to create pedestrian-only zones.

The benefits of the Masterplan

The Ulster Architectural Heritage Society recognises the benefits that the regeneration of the West Side would bring, both to the local community and retailers and the wider city.

We acknowledge that the west side has an enormous amount of potential that could be unlocked through the policies expressed in the concept plan. We strongly agree that the traditional buildings in the area lend to it a distinctive character and charm and that this should be used to guide all future development plans.

We would, however, like the intention of "repairing the urban fabric" to be properly defined. The infill of gap sites, especially within a Conservation Area, is a particular challenge.

We trust these comments are of assistance in devising the final regeneration plan.

Yours sincerely,

Rita Harkin
Research Officer