

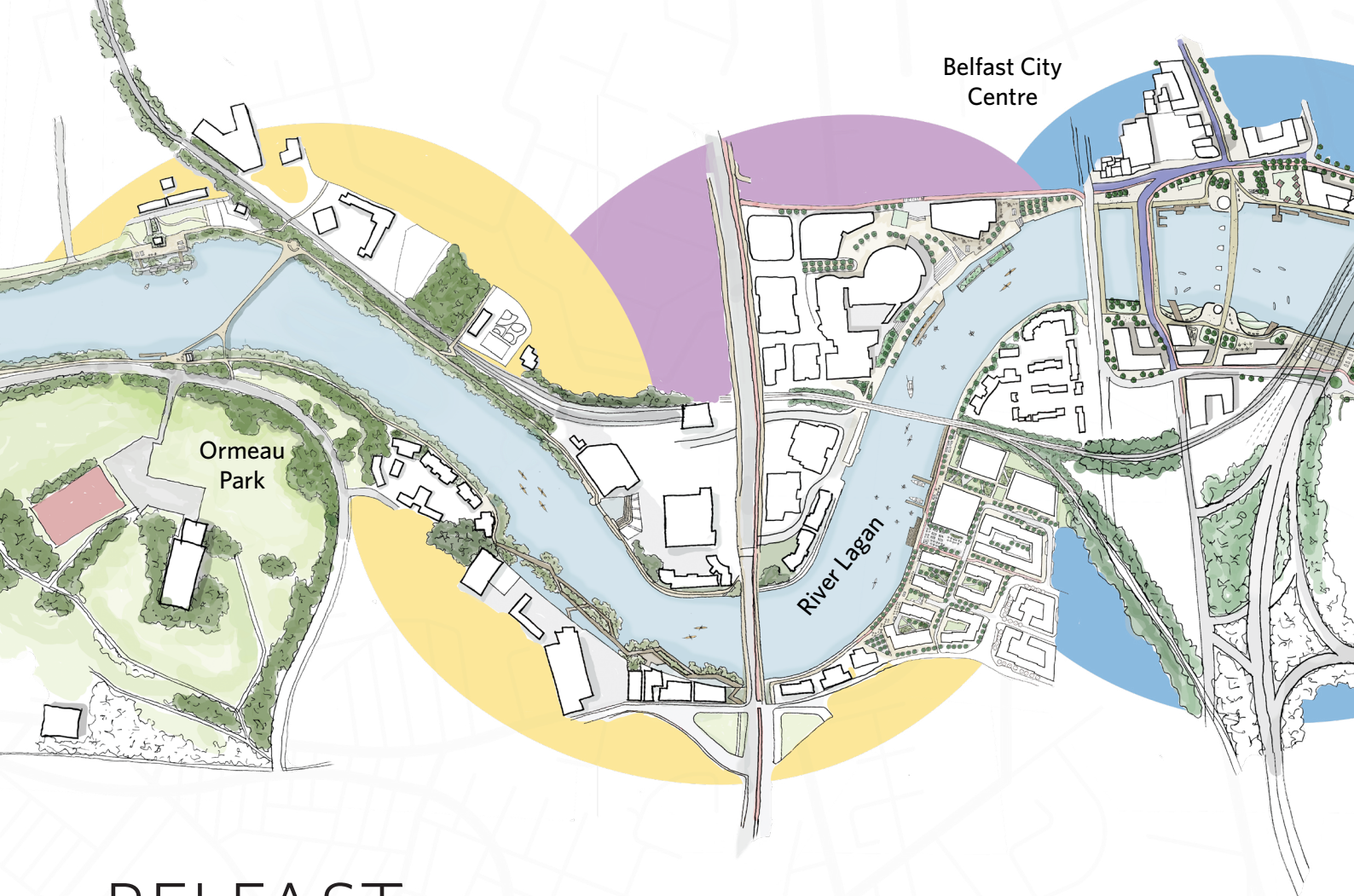
EMBRACING THE BELFAST WATERFRONT

Framework Summary

A framework for the future development of
the Belfast Waterfront Promenade

September 2023

 SCHULZE
GRASSOV



BELFAST WATERFRONT PROMENADE

This is a summary of **Embracing the Belfast Waterfront**, a framework for future development at the interface of water and land along the River Lagan in Belfast.

This study was commissioned by Belfast's Waterfront Task Group, consisting of key landowners and stakeholders along the waterfront including Maritime Belfast, Belfast Harbour, Belfast City Council, Titanic Quarter Limited, Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure, Department for Economy, Department for Agriculture and Environment and Tourism NI. The Task Group has been established to scope how the waterfront can fully realise its potential as a connected, vibrant corridor linking to and with key destinations, neighbourhood communities and the city centre.

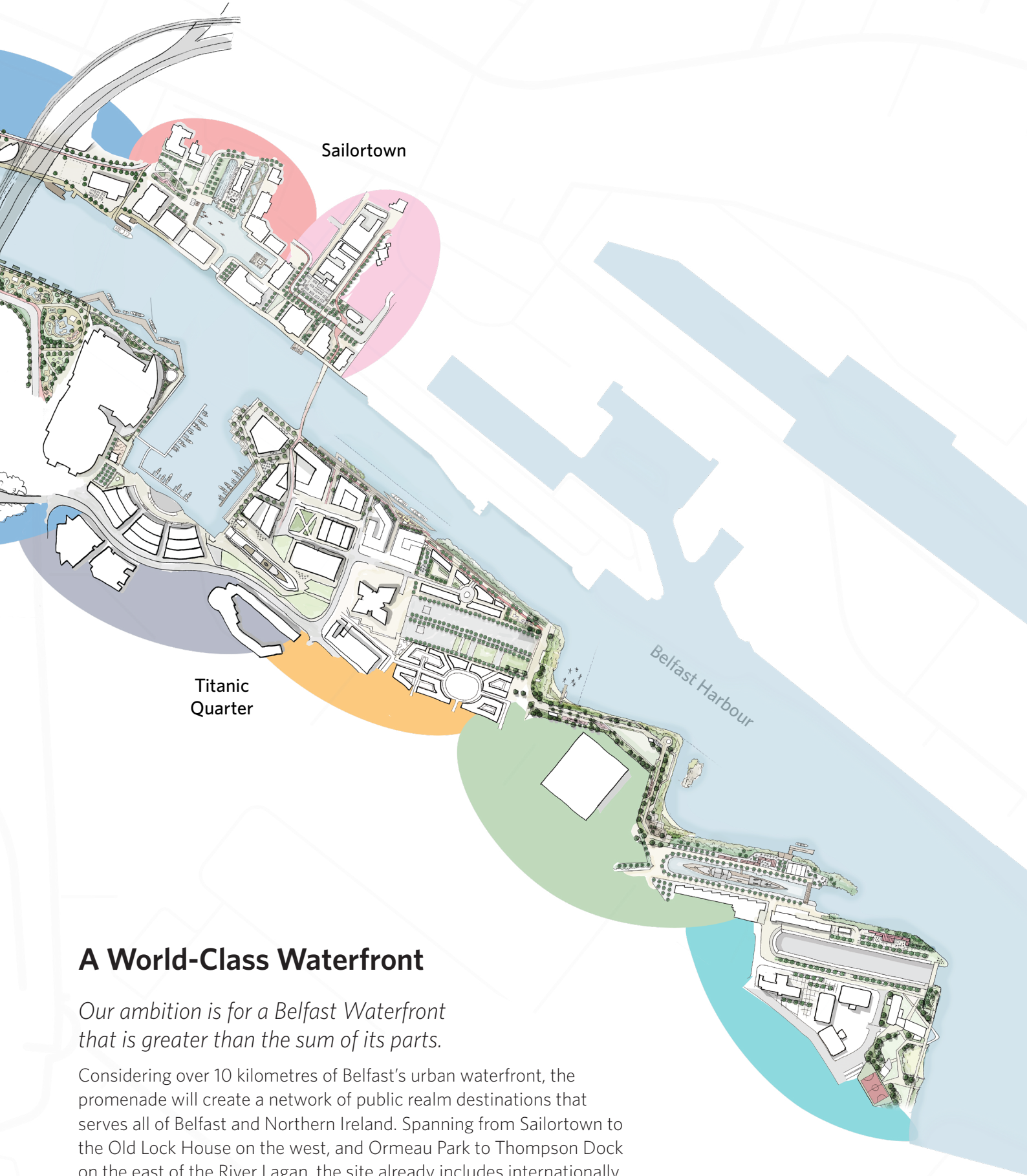
Vision

Belfast Waterfront is a critical component of the city's economic growth ambitions, and the promenade project will bring it to life.

The Waterfront Promenade project is **an important opportunity to encourage and harmonise new sustainable development on the waterfront**. The promenade will create a high-quality environment for existing communities, new residential and commercial development, and will serve as a major visitor gateway.

Exploring the promenade will offer connections to iconic tourist attractions and heritage assets. **Simultaneously, the promenade will become a hub of distinctive and vibrant cultural activities, attracting a dynamic setting for creative and green enterprise**. Development of the promenade sparks a point of momentum for net-zero and blue economies to emerge, adding employment and training opportunities that will have a genuinely positive impact on the lives of those living or working adjacent to it. **The envisioned waterfront promenade will offer safe and green public spaces to socialize, infrastructure for active travel and exercise, improved connectivity and easier access to jobs and services.**

By balancing community, nature, and development, a world-class waterfront will emerge over time.



Sailortown

Titanic Quarter

Belfast Harbour

A World-Class Waterfront

Our ambition is for a Belfast Waterfront that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Considering over 10 kilometres of Belfast's urban waterfront, the promenade will create a network of public realm destinations that serves all of Belfast and Northern Ireland. Spanning from Sailortown to the Old Lock House on the west, and Ormeau Park to Thompson Dock on the east of the River Lagan, the site already includes internationally recognized points of interest that attract people from all over the world. Direct access to City Centre, East Side, North Foreshore, and the Lagan Towpath will connect Belfast's communities back to the waterfront.

A future connected waterfront promenade will be defined by variations in combinations of shoreline typology, building density, and programming. Three typologies emerge which can be customized within each character area: urban, maritime, and natural.

Framework Objectives

Unlocking a strategic opportunity of national scale to encourage usage on both sides of the River Lagan to achieve the ambition set by the Bolder Vision.

Create a Distinctive and Competitive Place

Deliver the cultural and lifestyle offerings to meet local needs, attract global talent and entice Northern Ireland’s diaspora to live, invest, and innovate.

Deliver Social Value for Local Communities

Improve health, wellbeing, safety, and employment opportunities for deprived communities, create welcoming and safe spaces for community to flourish.

Bolster Climate Resilience and the Circular Economy

Make a significant contribution to net zero aspirations by enhancing active travel options, incorporating renewables, green industries and the circular economy.

Drive Further Tourism Success

Improving access and connections between existing assets and creating new destinations and experiences.

A Focal Point for City Growth Ambitions

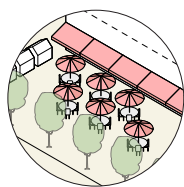
Accommodate significant housing and commercial growth around the waterfront, while supporting future growth of port operations.

Catalyse Investment and Unify Development

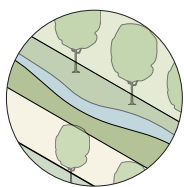
Align plans for different sections of the waterfront to a clear vision, invest to encourage private sector action.

Toolkit Interventions

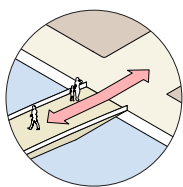
Our approach is to consider the site from multiple perspectives: the scale of the promenade, the places that are connected to the waterfront, and the processes that will shape the future of the Belfast Waterfront. This ‘toolkit’ of interventions is a starting point for designing custom solutions to enhance each character area. Some interventions should be incorporated in all character areas, like SuDS, while others are only suitable in some locations, like playgrounds.



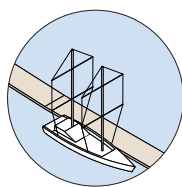
Food+Beverage



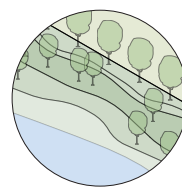
SuDS



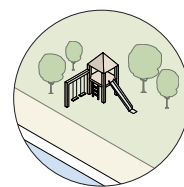
Bridges & Active Travel



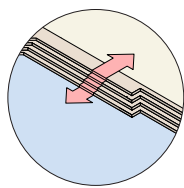
Heritage & Views



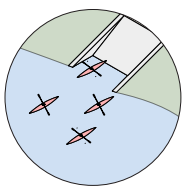
Habitat



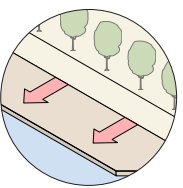
Playground



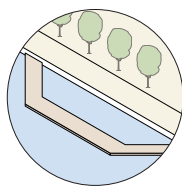
Stepped Shoreline



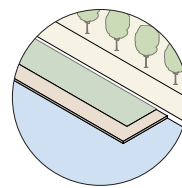
Boat Ramps & Moorings



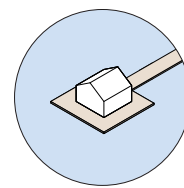
Boardwalk Extension



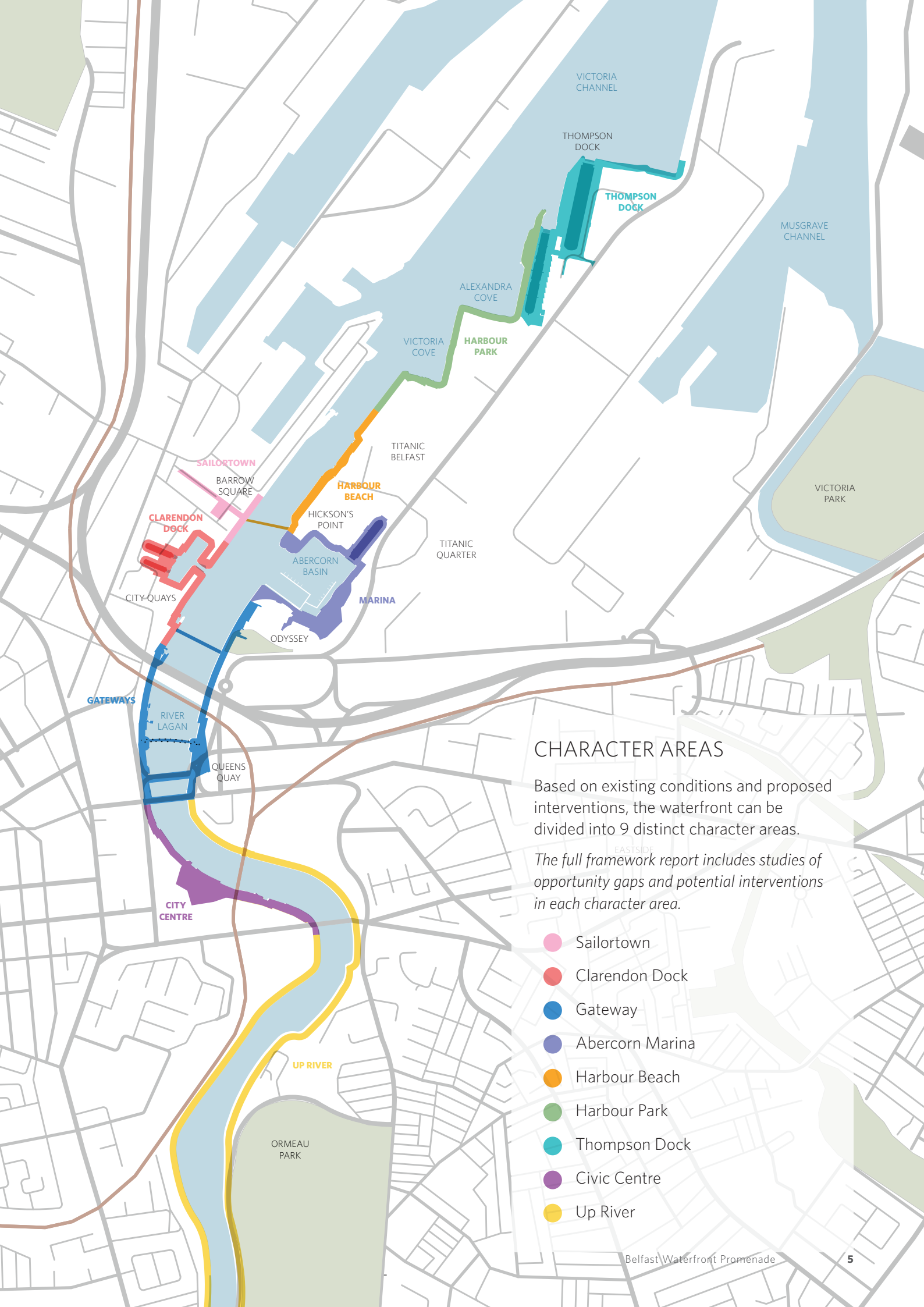
Floating Boardwalk



Floating Wetland



Floating Business



CHARACTER AREAS

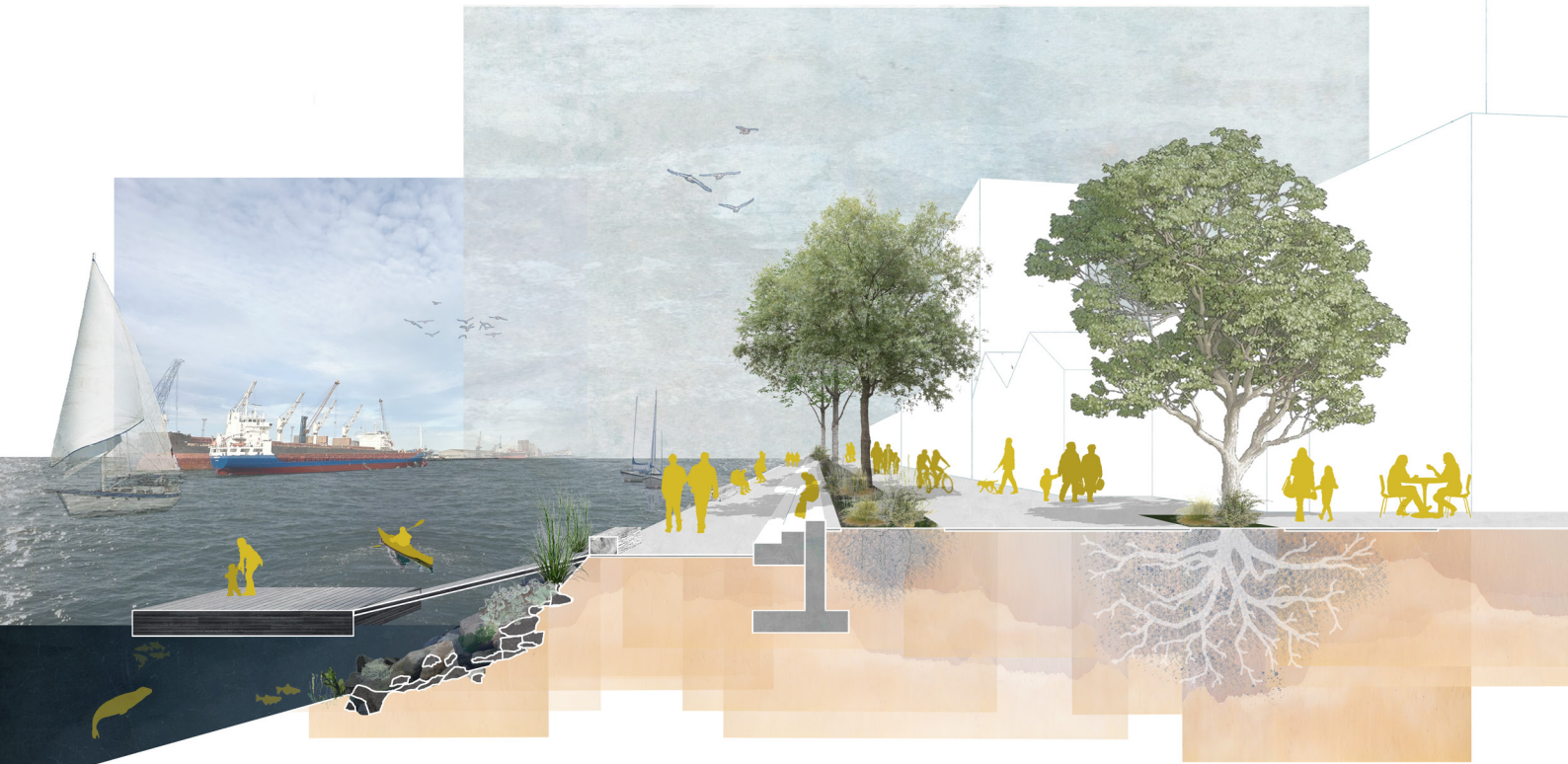
Based on existing conditions and proposed interventions, the waterfront can be divided into 9 distinct character areas.

The full framework report includes studies of opportunity gaps and potential interventions in each character area.

- Sailortown
- Clarendon Dock
- Gateway
- Abercorn Marina
- Harbour Beach
- Harbour Park
- Thompson Dock
- Civic Centre
- Up River

Waterfront Parameters

An urban waterfront promenade is more than just the area of public realm. Often narrow, it is shaped by its neighbours: the buildings and the water that border and support it. The Belfast promenade will connect many neighbourhoods, presenting varied challenges and requiring diverse solutions. As such, we consider interventions in the public realm, water's edge, and buildings with equal importance.



A Living Shoreline

Environmental engineered shorelines embrace ecosystem services and create access to the water fostering a sense of connection and responsibility.

Split-level Promenade

A split-level promenade creates shared space for active travel while integrating seating and flood defense.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

A sustainable drainage system with connected soil creates a resilient network of street trees and native planting that filters stormwater, increases habitat, and creates a welcoming environment.

Activated Public Realm

Varied building heights with setbacks create a more comfortable public realm where ground level businesses can spill out.

Conditions Unique to Belfast Waterfront

Opportunities

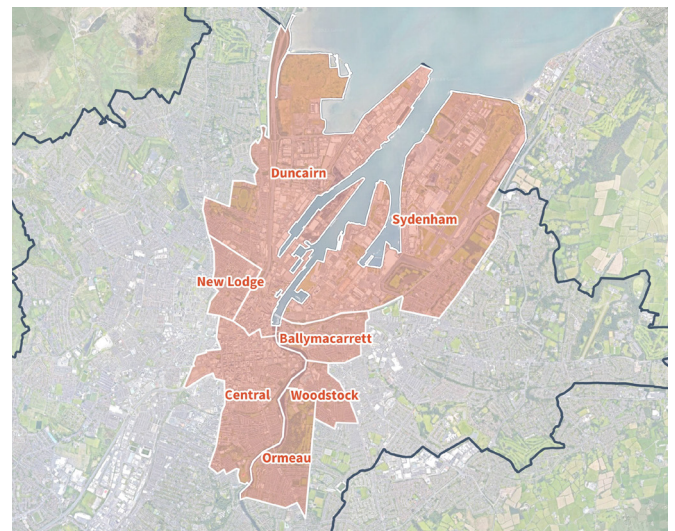
- + Samson and Goliath as roving landmarks in a working harbour
- + Rich maritime history and heritage unique to each neighbourhood
- + Belfast Hills provide a natural backdrop
- + Large scale, continuous waterfront
- + Proximity to city centre

Challenges

- + Loud bridges in need of acoustic barriers
- + Flood risk is increasing which needs soft and hard engineering
- + Excessive river railing disconnects people from the water
- + Hard shoreline decreases ecosystem services
- + Few connections across the water given the length of shoreline

LOCAL IMPACT AREA (LIA)

A preliminary Local Impact Area (LIA) for the promenade has been defined based on ward boundaries adjacent to the waterfront between Ormeau Park and the harbour.



Source: NISRA, Ward Boundaries (2014)

LIA User Groups



**125,500
Workers**

54% of total Belfast workforce within the LIA (2019)



**40,500
Residents**

12% of Belfast population within the LIA (2019)
15,500 of these residents reside in the top 10% most deprived wards in NI



**45,000
Students**

Across Ulster Belfast, QUB and Belfast Met TQ campuses that fall within the LIA (2022)



**1.9m
Visitors**

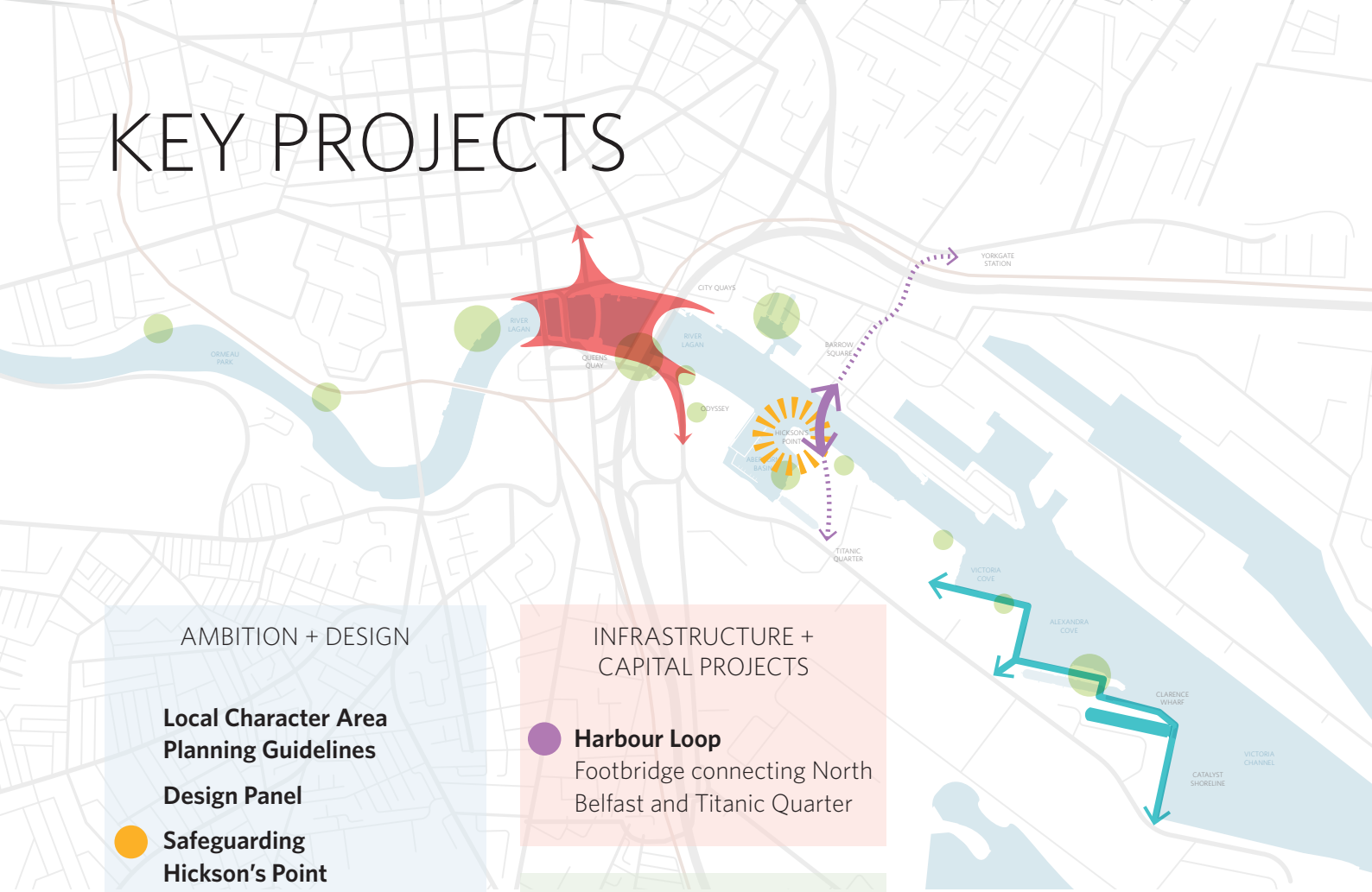
Overnight trips to Belfast (2019)
Plus 3.6m approx. footfall to TQ and Odyssey complex within the LIA (2017)



**4.1m
Travellers**

200,000 Cruise Passengers (2018)
1.5m ferry trips between GB (2021)
2.4m City Airport passengers (2019)

KEY PROJECTS



AMBITION + DESIGN

Local Character Area Planning Guidelines

Design Panel

- **Safeguarding Hickson's Point**
Future prominence

INFRASTRUCTURE + CAPITAL PROJECTS

- **Harbour Loop**
Footbridge connecting North Belfast and Titanic Quarter

PROMENADE + CONNECTIONS

- **Thompson & Alexandra Docks**
Heritage, biodiversity and connectivity
- **Gateways**
Connectivity, amenity and unlocking investment

ACTIVATION + MEANWHILE USE

- **Kickstarting the Waterfront Vision**
Meanwhile uses and ecological enrichment

Consultant Recommendations

1. *Establish the Waterfront Promenade as a character area in its own right, with its own characteristics and design guidelines*
2. *Pilot a City Design Panel to review proposals along the Promenade*
3. *Strengthen collaboration and project integration under the Waterfront Task Group*

Development Priorities

We have derived key projects based on alignment with stakeholder priorities and community feedback, scale of impact and potential to catalyse wider benefits and public investment, and potential for short term design development and feasibility testing.

- + Infrastructure, strategic planning, and investment opportunities on key sites
- + Phased implementation of promenade interventions, coordinated with planned development along entire waterfront
- + Initial activation and meanwhile use that is community oriented, dispersed, and flexible
- + Design guidelines adopted by planning authorities with expert design panel to provide advice, challenge, and support

Local Character Area Planning Guidelines

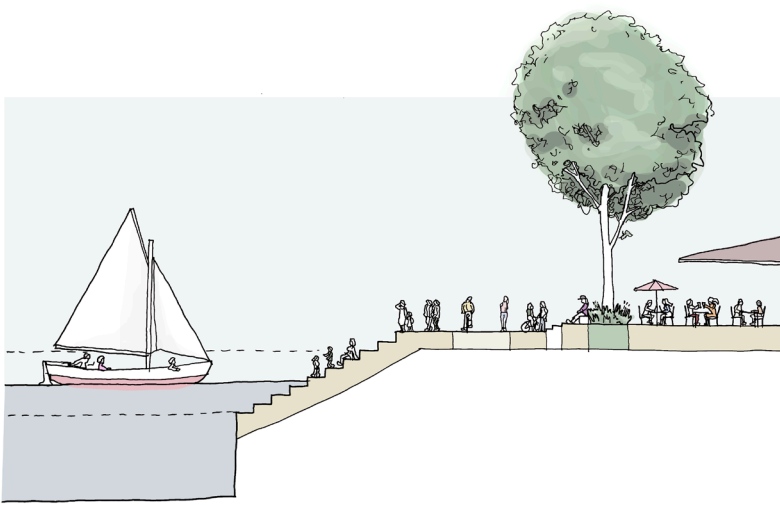
AMBITION + DESIGN

- + Align the Waterfront Promenade with Belfast Local Development Plan Aims and Objectives in order to receive recognition as a Character Area with design guidelines



STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Belfast Local Development Plan: 2035 Plan Strategy



Design Panel

AMBITION + DESIGN

- + Pilot a City Design Panel to review proposals along the Promenade against guidelines and surrounding context

Safeguarding Hickson's Point

AMBITION + DESIGN

The prominence of Hickson's Point and exposure to views from all directions create a place of great opportunity for national significance.

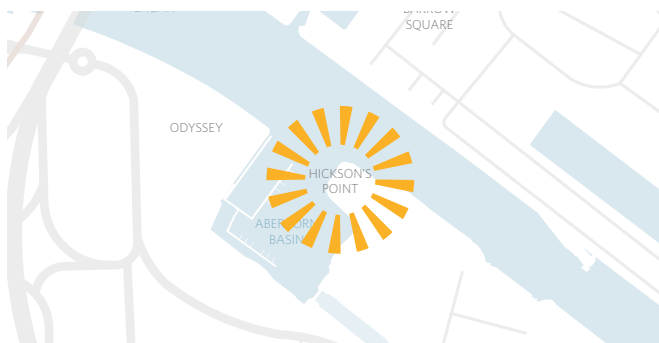
Public space design and potential building functions in this location should emphasize a lively public destination and avoid exclusive use for residential or commercial space.

DESIGN CONCEPT

- + Embrace this prominent point for civic use such as a building of national importance or an iconic public space
- + Potential public realm improvements include stepped access to the water's edge, gathering spaces, and ground level activation

SCOPE AND IMPACTS

- + Strengthening Belfast's attractiveness and lifestyle proposition through new cultural infrastructure, celebrating former slipway site
- + Sydney Opera House effect: Bold aspiration for iconic city-defining asset which substantially improves tourism visitation
- + Public sector addresses key market failure relating to significant site remediation costs, supporting investment at Titanic Quarter



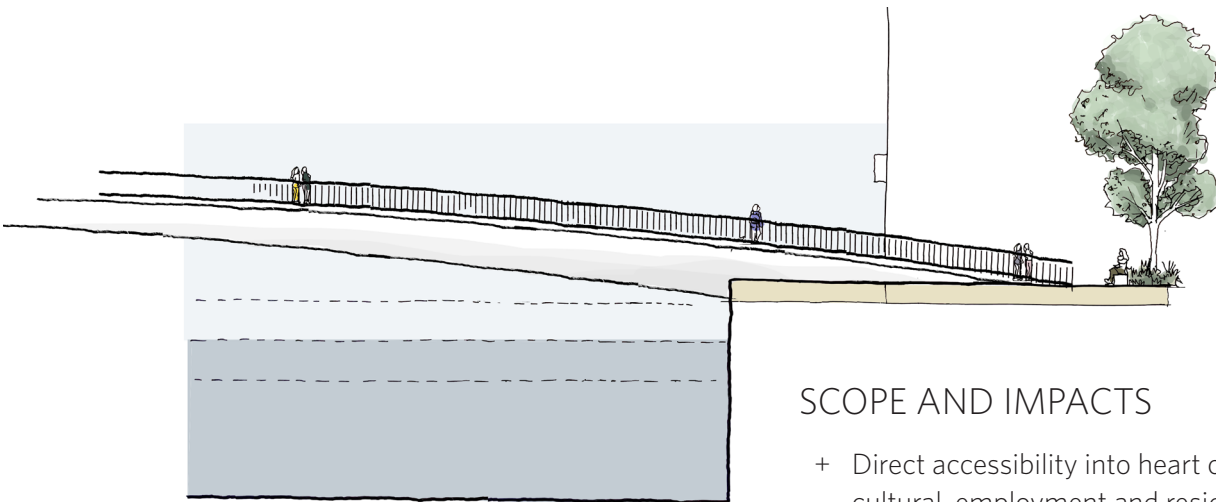
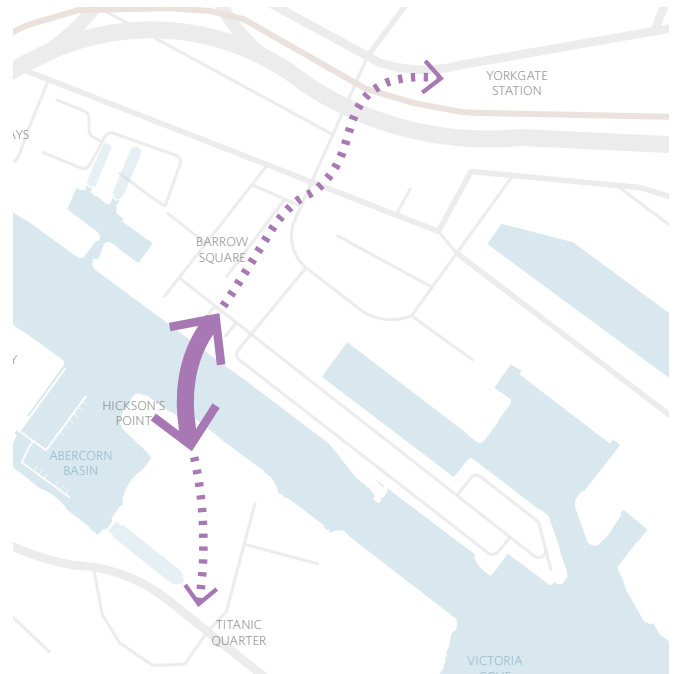
Harbour Loop

INFRASTRUCTURE + CAPITAL PROJECTS

New pedestrian and cyclist bridge directly connecting Titanic Quarter to North Belfast, driving footfall and catalysing investment across the Harbour while enhancing the waterfront experience for all users.

DESIGN CONCEPT

- + New footbridge that ties into the waterfront promenade and connects with the wider transit network
- + Statement swing bridge design to maintain sailboat access to the marina
- + Placemaking on bridge landings on both sides of the river including shelter and restrooms



SCOPE AND IMPACTS

- + Direct accessibility into heart of Titanic Quarter's cultural, employment and residential offering
- + Significant land value benefit to Clarendon Dock, Sailortown, North Belfast and Titanic Quarter
- + Sustainable connectivity with Yorkgate Station and wider active travel potential
- + Extended 'footfall loop' exposing City Quays, Sailortown, TQ and Odyssey to significant new passing trade

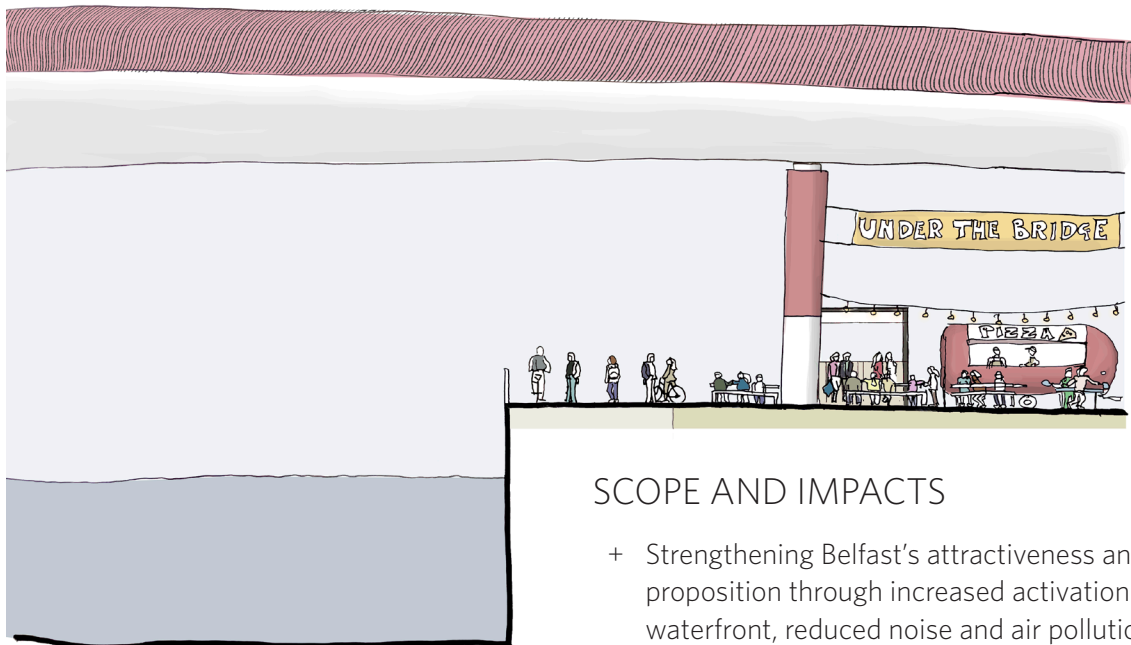
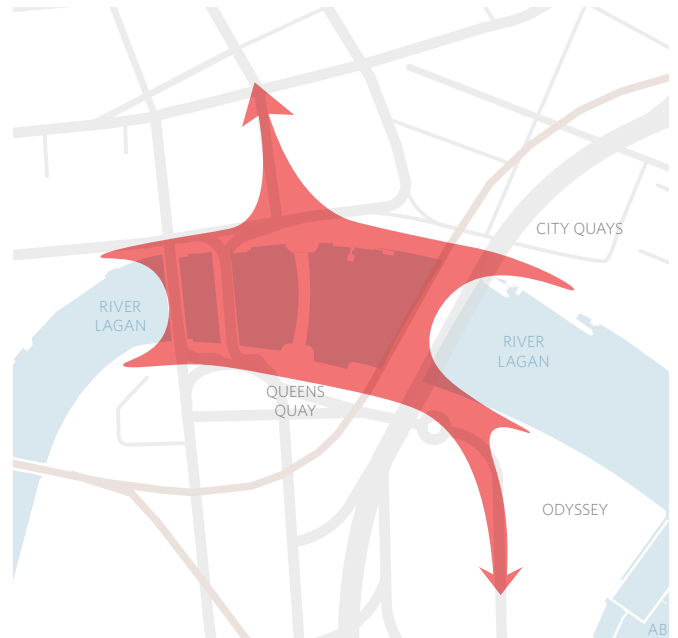
Gateways

PROMENADE + CONNECTIONS

Transforming the gateway to Belfast Harbour, leveraging untapped commercial potential while addressing congestion, noise, pollution and severance to create a series of new riverfront destinations.

DESIGN CONCEPT

- + Activation under motorway through street food market, public events and exhibits, and play park
- + Art and lighting for day and night enjoyment
- + Mitigate water and noise pollution from M3 with SuDS and an acoustic barrier
- + Boat access points for the ferry, water taxis, and small boats to access Belfast City Centre.



SCOPE AND IMPACTS

- + Strengthening Belfast's attractiveness and lifestyle proposition through increased activation the City Centre waterfront, reduced noise and air pollution, improved safety
- + Enabling works to unlock major development sites at Queens Quay, Odyssey Quays and wider City Centre regeneration
- + Improved active travel and public transport access to Harbour and movement across East and West Belfast

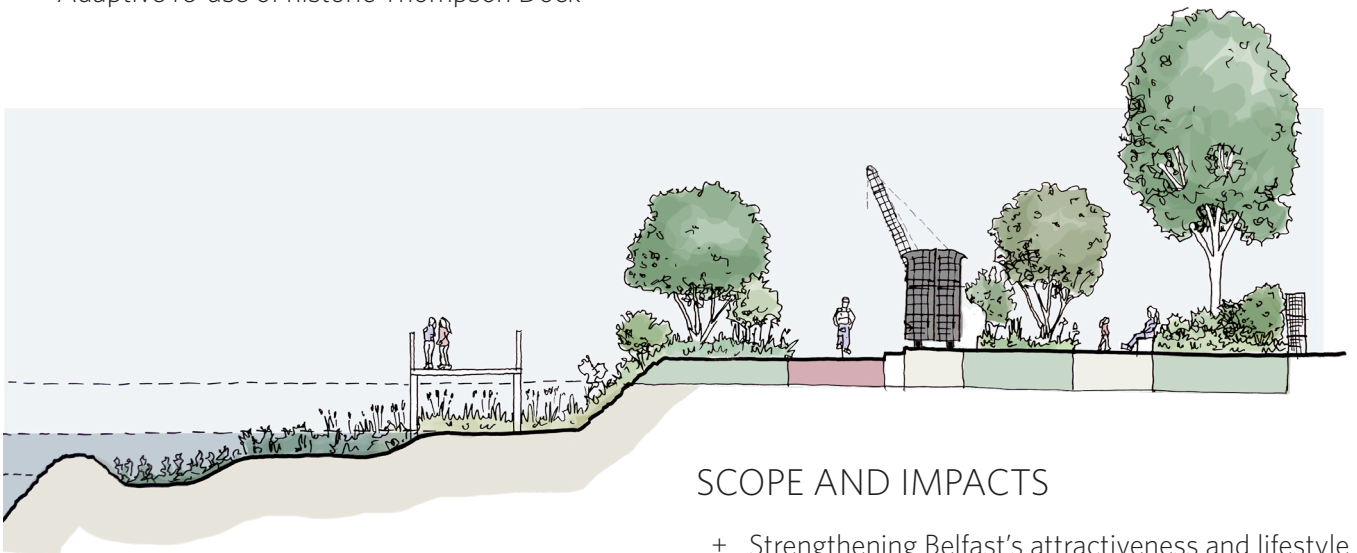
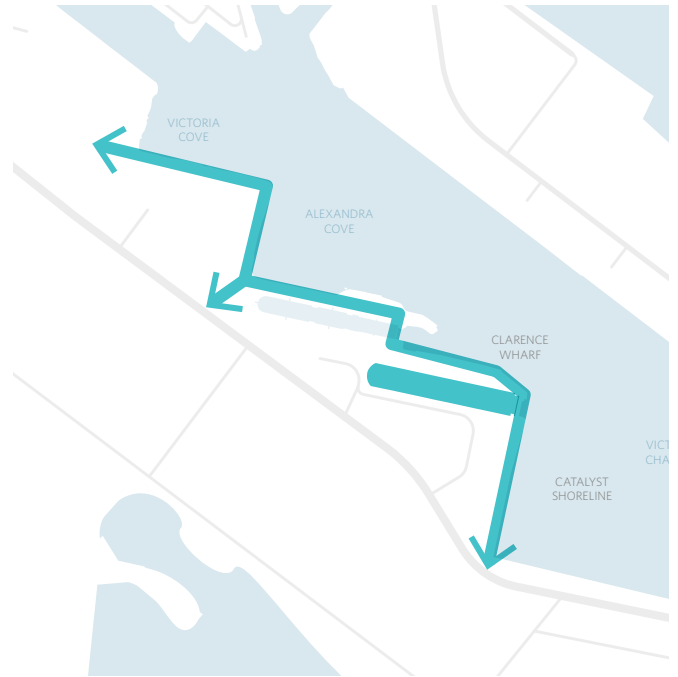
Thompson & Alexandra Docks

PROMENADE + CONNECTIONS

Enhancing harbour heritage, improving marine ecosystem, and strengthening connectivity and wayfinding to establish the Harbour's northern docks as a compelling tourist attraction and cultural destination.

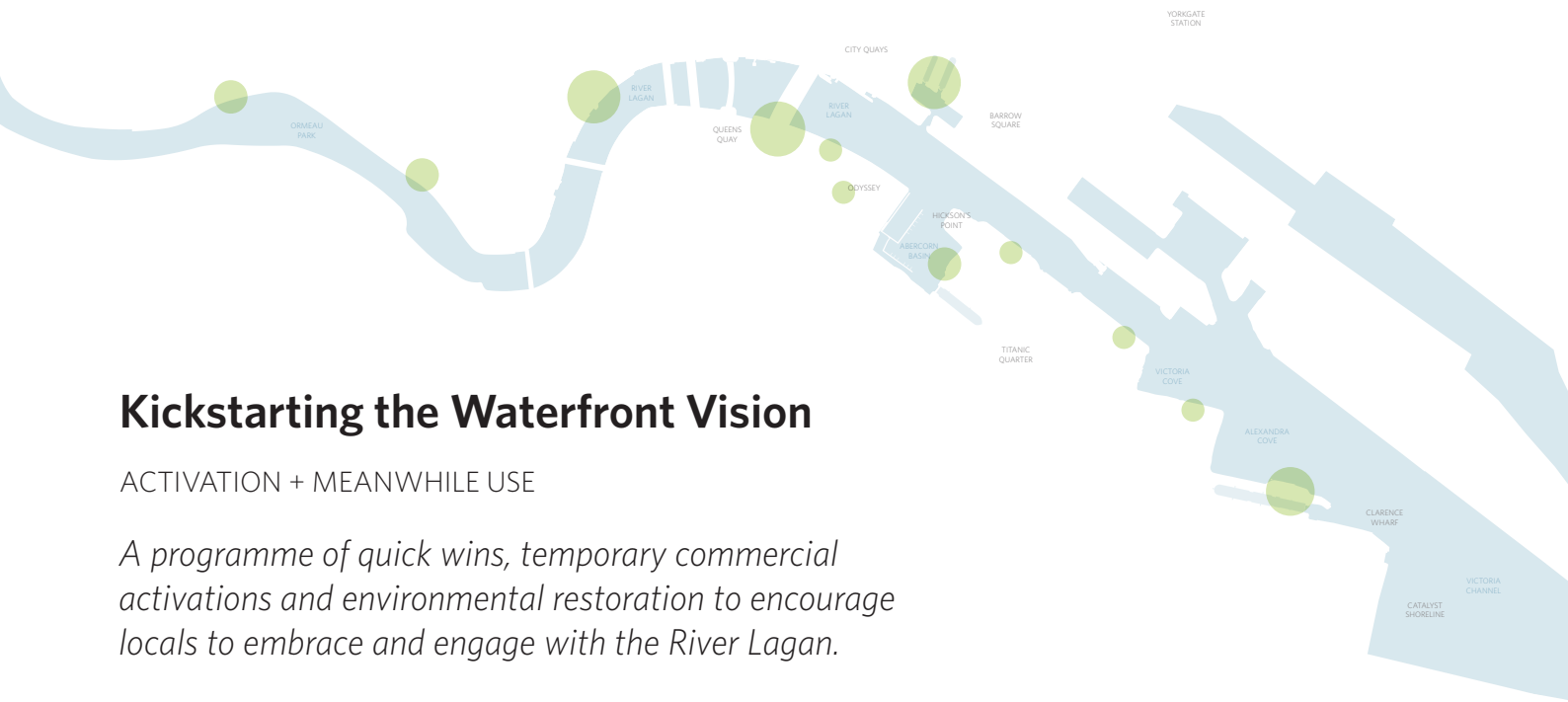
DESIGN CONCEPT

- + Improve existing connection and access along promenade and to Queen's Road
- + Activation of public realm surrounding the docks to support heritage attractions
- + Ecological enhancement along shoreline creating a linear park
- + Adaptive re-use of historic Thompson Dock



SCOPE AND IMPACTS

- + Strengthening Belfast's attractiveness and lifestyle proposition through new cultural infrastructure, celebrating port and heritage and access to restored natural spaces
- + Extending Titanic Belfast experience to support higher tourist volumes and extended length of stay
- + Strengthening case for longer-term TQ residential development east of Queens Road and workspace tenant interest in Catalyst



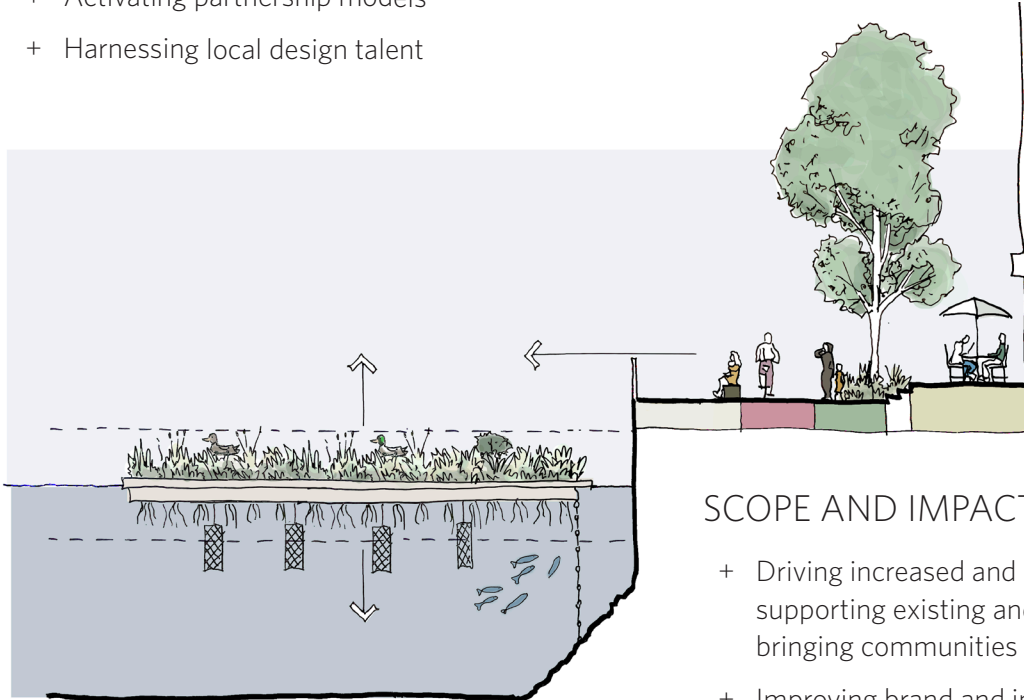
Kickstarting the Waterfront Vision

ACTIVATION + MEANWHILE USE

A programme of quick wins, temporary commercial activations and environmental restoration to encourage locals to embrace and engage with the River Lagan.

DESIGN CONCEPT

- + Pop-up Food+Beverage in areas of future permanent activation
- + Ecological enhancement, including SuDS, shoreline restoration, oyster beds, etc, to begin ecosystem services
- + Exhibits, events, and festivals to celebrate local heritage
- + Dispersed and flexible interventions
- + Activating partnership models
- + Harnessing local design talent



SCOPE AND IMPACTS

- + Driving increased and extended visitation supporting existing and meanwhile businesses, bringing communities back to the river
- + Improving brand and image and demonstrating viability of long-term use
- + Improvements capitalised into land value and final development
- + Testing of design treatments and promenade enhancements within a limited area as a quality benchmark

PROJECT LEAD + DESIGN



ENGINEERING



ECONOMICS



DOCUMENT ISSUE

September 15, 2023

Illustrations and photographs are credited to Schulze+Grassov, unless otherwise noted.