

# Inner North West Masterplan Consultation Report

November 2018

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Inner North West (INW) Masterplan has been prepared on behalf of Belfast City Council to provide proposals for the area as a part of the wider strategic development of the city. The masterplan seeks to provide a framework to help shape emerging opportunities and ensure a more comprehensive approach to development of both public and private sector owned land.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview of:
- consultation and engagement activity that took place to inform the development of the draft masterplan;
  - summary of the feedback received at consultation and engagement events and comments submitted in response to the draft masterplan; and
  - key amendments to the masterplan following the consultation process.

## 2.0 Consultation and engagement

### Pre-consultation

- 2.1 In 2017, pre-consultation took place with key stakeholders to shape the draft masterplan and inform council's approach to engagement. The following stakeholders were engaged as part of the process:
- Greater Falls Neighbourhood Partnership;
  - Lower Shankill;
  - Brown Square;
  - Carrick Hill;
  - Castle Street traders; and
  - Smithfield & Union Traders.
- 2.2 Engagement with statutory partners included the Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure, Translink and the Historic Environment Division and feedback received shaped the draft masterplan.

### Formal consultation

- 2.3 The formal 12-week consultation for the masterplan began on 13 February 2018 and concluded on 8 May 2018. A range of communication channels were used to provide information about the consultation including:
- The Belfast City Council website and online consultation hub;
  - <https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/>;
  - letters and emails to residents, traders, stakeholders and network groups;
  - City Matters (delivered to every Belfast household);
  - external press; and
  - social media throughout the consultation period and programmed at key intervals.
- 2.4 Copies of the draft masterplan and summary leaflets were available on the Belfast City Council website. Hard copies were also available from the Cecil Ward Building, Central Library and at all consultation and engagement events. Large font and braille formats of the summary leaflet were also made available.

2.5 Exhibitions with A1 boards summarising the Masterplan were on display at the following times and locations:

Locations	Date	Time
Cecil Ward Building	13 <sup>th</sup> February – 13 <sup>th</sup> April	Mon–Fri: 8.30 - 4.30pm
Central Library	16 <sup>th</sup> April – 8 <sup>th</sup> May	Mon: 9:00am - 8:00pm Tue: 9:00am - 5:30pm Wed: 9:00am - 5:30pm Thurs: 9:00am - 8:00pm Fri: 9:00am - 5:30pm Sat: 10:00am - 4:30pm

2.6 A presentation on the Masterplan followed by question and answers was held at Berry Street Presbyterian Church on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February at 6pm. Approximately 40 people attended the event.

2.7 Boards summarising the Masterplan were on display and officers were available to answer questions at drop-in sessions at locations throughout the Inner North West area as detailed below:

Date	Time	Location
Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> February	12noon – 6.00pm	Berry Street Presbyterian Church
Tuesday 27 <sup>th</sup> February	12noon – 2.00pm	Castle Court Shopping Centre
Saturday 10 <sup>th</sup> March	6.00pm – 7.30pm	St Patrick’s Hall Donegall Street
Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> April	11.00am – 2.00pm	Central Library
Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> April	11.00am – 2.00pm	Central Library
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	11.00am – 2.00pm	Central Library

2.8 An architect-led walkabout of the study area took place on 21 March 2018. The walkabout was followed by a focused discussion with residents and traders in Central Library. Approximately 17 people attended the walkabout.

2.9 In addition, focused meetings and/or presentations also took place with a number of groups, organisations and private sector developers operating in the area including:

- Cathedral Quarter BID
- Cathedral Quarter Trust
- BID One
- Ulster Reform Club
- Carrick Hill Residents
- West Belfast Partnership
- Shared City Partnership
- Section 75 Consultative Forum

- Campus Community Regeneration Forum

## 3.0 Responses to the draft Masterplan

- 3.1 During the formal 12-week consultation period effort was made to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders, including residents, businesses, statutory partners and developers. Feedback was collected at the drop-in sessions, walk-about sessions, meetings and presentations.
- 3.2 There were 36 formal responses received; 24 of these were returned via email while 12 were submitted via Citizen Space. An overview of the comments has been summarised below.

### The Inner North West in Context

- Acknowledgement of how thriving the area was in the past.
- Respondents also noted that the area was once a vibrant part of the city and remains an important area.
- Area must be sensitively developed and requires greater engagement with existing communities within the wider development.
- Some respondents commented that the context section highlighted how neglect and forgotten the area has become.
- Respondents commented on the need for regeneration of the area and were supportive of investment.
- Masterplan boundary needs clarification. It was suggested that Wellington Place would have been a more obvious boundary.
- A respondent also noted the lack of acknowledgement of neighbouring communities.
- There was a request for inclusion of an assessment of planning policies and guidance.

### The Inner North West Analysis

- Background analysis should be included in final document.
- Respondents supported the retention and preservation of historic (Maddens & Hercules) and listed buildings.
- Concerns were raised regarding the exclusion of the Conservation Area boundary from maps.
- Respondents highlighted that vacant buildings have huge potential.
- CastleCourt was identified as a barrier.
- Request for public ownership maps to be included.
- Detail requested on how many people living in the area.
- There was agreement that Carrick Hill/Millfield was problematic.
- Concern that area of King Street between Black Taxis and McGarvery's cycles is not listed as a problematic area - width of the area is over scaled and considered very dysfunctional.
- A respondent questioned why Carrick Hill/Millfield is the only existing challenge.

### Vision and objectives

- There was broad support for the vision.
- Council should lead development; need more ambition in terms of design and vision.

- Ulster University considered that the vision complemented the new campus and benefits it will bring to the city however, several other organisations/individuals raised an issue of over emphasis on university which is outside the study area boundary.
- Welcome development of 'mixed' neighbourhood.
- There was broad support for the eight objectives.
- There was a great deal of support for protection of heritage and character of the area. Respondents were also supportive of re-using existing buildings.
- There was a lot of support for a variety of residential accommodation and tenures. Many highlighted the need for supporting infrastructure for residents living in the area.
- Respondents were supportive of independent retail.
- There were mixed views in relation to managing transport and parking facilities and the promotion of sustainable travel. While most were supportive of this objective, some highlighted a need to provide parking and inadequacies in public transport provision which hinder a shift to sustainable transport.
- The SEA highlighted that the natural heritage of the area had not been given adequate attention and should be included as an objective.
- Request to put community cohesion up front and centre.
- Some expressed concern over precedents as examples of gentrification.

## The Inner North West Design Principles

### Create a Network of Open Spaces

- Generally broad support for the creation of a network of open spaces and pocket parks.
- Some respondents highlighted the need for spaces to be activated and managed to ensure they do not become associated with specific groups or communities or hotspots for anti-social behaviour.
- Suggested that spaces should be age-friendly and accessible to all – disabled, children, families.
- It was suggested that sun path diagrams should be included to ensure areas of open space are exposed to the sun.
- Development of shared spaces cannot be underestimated; need integration of Shared Space Principles.
- Support for high quality public realm with tree planting and street furniture.

### Improve North-South Connections

- There was a lot of support for improving north-south connections in the study area.
- Many people commented on the impact of CastleCourt and how it has hindered movement throughout the study area. Respondents welcomed principles to introduce an access through CastleCourt.
- Severance by road infrastructure is major issue, particularly for communities and areas adjacent to the masterplan boundary – creates physical and psychological divide.

### Improve east-west Connections

- There was also a lot of support for improving east-west connections in the area.
- Respondents welcomed principles to open up Berry Street.
- Traffic junctions create disconnect and visual and psychological barriers, in addition to safety, consideration should be given to ways to go over the road with innovative structures.

### Heritage to inform the masterplan

- In relation to heritage, many were supportive of re-using existing buildings and there was significant support for the protection of listed and non-listed buildings.
- Concerns were raised that the Conservation Area boundary was not included on some of the maps.
- Concerns that some non-listed buildings e.g. Hercules and Maddens appeared to be re-developed.
- Some respondents also highlighted that heritage does not refer only to the buildings but also activities, uses and traditions.
- Undesignated buildings should be offered protection.
- Request for presumption against demolition.
- Preference for red brick in line with vernacular.
- Heritage could be a positive mechanism for engagement, especially with young people
- There are other buildings of historical interest.
- Ensure preservation is incorporated into new plans and proposals that reflect demand, rather than using preservation as a barrier for now providing housing.
- Want commitment to retain buildings on Winetavern Street.

### Identify the key opportunity sites

- There was support for identifying opportunity sites that are lying vacant.
- Public land should be identified.
- Redevelopment of vacant sites on a strategic rather than piecemeal basis.

### Mixed uses to support city centre living

- Respondents were supportive of creating a mix of uses in the area including independent retail, services and amenities such as schools and GPs.
- Some respondents were keen to see vacant upper floors of retail units being used and a Living over the Shop Schemes (LOTS).
- While respondents were generally supportive of the area being re-developed, some were concerned about the potential implications of redevelopment on existing businesses e.g. rent increases and being outpriced of the area.
- Support for the retention of the urban fabric and grain in the area and to encourage local traders over chain companies.
- Purpose Built and Managed Student Accommodation will have an impact on area; needs more consideration.

### Create density for population growth

- Some respondents highlighted the need to sensitively manage increases in density.
- Concern raised in relation to heights.
- Need to strike balance between respecting building heights and encouraging investment.
- Storage and collection of recyclable material and waste needs consideration in developments.
- Reduce carbon footprint through re-use of materials, water conservation/harvesting and circular economy thinking.
- Living Over The Shops should be made more explicit.
- Minimum of 20% of residential development in the INW committed to social and affordable housing, accessible dwellings and wheelchair housing units.

- Redevelopment should be on strategic rather than piecemeal basis and feasible approach to the delivery of social and affordable housing in terms of both location and sustainability.
- All homes should be built to Lifetime Homes Standard.
- New homes and employment to be connected by permeable and creative public realm and promotion of sustainable forms of transport.

#### Create a Strong Street hierarchy and active frontages

- Request for clearly drawn street and lane sections with tree structure.
- There was support for 'active frontages'.

#### Provide Appropriate public parking

- There was broad support for reducing the impact of surface level car parks.
- Recognition that there is demand for parking but also the detrimental impact it has on people living in the city in terms of air quality which is a huge health issue.
- Further information needed on how car parking will be integrated into new building types.
- Noted that commuter parking is already an issue in surrounding areas. Any further reduction would have increasingly adverse impact.
- Some respondents were supportive of reducing parking as the dominance of cars has created difficulties for communities living in close proximity to the city centre. Conversely it was questioned why reduce parking when public transport is considered inadequate.

#### Support public transport

- Support for sustainable transport and reducing dependency on private car.
- Recognition of need to balance provision for car with sustainable transport.
- Some did however highlight that existing public transport is inadequate to create a meaningful shift.
- Changes to road network require traffic modelling.
- Support for improved and segregated cycle facilities.

#### Streets and Building Types

- There was significant support for city centre living and the provision for mixed-tenure housing. There was also support for family housing.
- Respondents highlighted that future developments require infrastructure, services and facilities available (within walking distance) to cater for a range of demographics.
- There were conflicting views on social and affordable housing – some view that social is needed instead of affordable, other view that affordable is required instead of social.
- Respondents requested clarity on who is going to live in city centre and highlighted that providing housing that is needed will be a challenge.
- Need to ensure housing isn't just for students; concern about proportion and balance.
- Extending the surrounding communities into the city centre will create tensions. It needs to be a shared space and this cannot be done without design. Potential interface could develop and area needs to be developed sensitively in order to keep the neutrality of the city centre.
- Area needs people/density/different types of housing and tenures.
- Provide sun path diagrams.

## Character Areas and Streets

- In relation to the Character areas, some raised concerns regarding potential tall buildings.
- Some respondents were opposed to tall buildings at gateways. It was argued that there should be a gradual transition rather than a sudden announcement.
- It was suggested that heights should be specified within the masterplan. It was also argued that heights should be fixed rather than varied.
- There were mixed views on the redevelopment of Smithfield. Some respondents recognised a need to revamp the existing market and re-configure Smithfield however; existing traders raised concerns regarding demolition of the building, where they would relocate to, potential rent increases as a result of redevelopment and the impact on their business.
- Large white blocks on illustrative masterplan are confusing.
- Many respondents also commented on the impact of the road infrastructure at Carrick Hill/Millfield and welcomed principles to create a more pedestrian friendly environment.
- Support for the removal of Castle Court service yard and promotion of programmes and animation in Bank Square.
- Severance along Carrick Hill and Millfield needs radical thinking and physical transformation to address severance.
- Changes to inner ring road would require traffic modelling.
- Broad support for reconfiguration of Smithfield Market and need to engage with and support existing traders.
- Include residential on North Street.

## Making it happen

- Further information needed on delivery including programme, targets, priorities and costings.
- Request for details of land ownership, especially publically owned land and planning approvals to be included.
- Encourage delivery by alignment with other statutory organisations - co-ordinated and multi-agency approach needed to ensure that all partners are fully committed to vision.
- Strong leadership required from council.
- Support use of section 76 contributions to enhance public realm and for provide social and economic benefits.
- Concerns over vesting were raised.
- Needs more detail on how masterplan will stimulate investment and achieve commercially viable private sector investment.
- Improved linkages between the Inner North West area and the rest of the city centre are vital. Masterplan should highlight how the proposals will actually link into the Masterplans for the adjoining area.
- Council should lead a delivery vehicle.
- Want a 3D model of masterplan.
- INW needs a design guide.
- Prioritisation exercise should be carried out to assist investment proposals by BCC & 3rd party developers to ensure comprehensive approaches are taken.

## 4.0 Key amendments to the masterplan

4.1 The final Inner North West Masterplan reflects changes based on feedback, engagement events, responses submitted and the Strategic Environmental Assessment. Key changes to the document are detailed below.

Section	Amendments to masterplan
<b>The Inner North West in Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The boundary intentionally excludes Wellington Place as it is considered an entirely different character compared to the rest of the Inner North West area.</li> <li>• The context has been amended to include socio-economic context providing information on the demographics of the area.</li> <li>• While the planning context has been amended to provide an overview of existing statutory policy and guidance, there has been no attempt to provide a full assessment of all existing planning policy. It is not the purpose of the masterplan to review existing planning policy or to create new policies.</li> <li>• Masterplan updated to reflect the Strategic Environmental Assessment, in Section 1.7 Environmental Context</li> </ul>
<b>The Inner North West Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Conservation Area boundary was added to the heritage map in the analysis section.</li> <li>• Heritage text amended to include reference to Conservation Area, adaptive reuse and design quality</li> <li>• King Street is recognised as a problematic area as it is included as a character area.</li> <li>• BCC published a Car Parking Strategy in April 2018. In line with the Car Parking Strategy, the masterplan seeks to offer sufficient, high quality and appropriately located parking which supports economic development within the city. The CPS notes that there are currently 45 surface car parking sites in the city centre many of which have limited capacity and low quality experience. It recommends that surface level car parks should be released for development opportunities and better use made of multi-storey car parking as they represent a better use of city centre space in terms of the number of spaces they provide for their area.</li> <li>• Sites in public ownership indicated on updated map in Section 2.2</li> <li>• Additional challenges identified in amended text, including landownership, antisocial behaviour and additional emphasis in the text in relation to the inner ring road</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The vision has been amended to recognise the range of contributing factors to the character of the area.</li> <li>• The heritage objective was amended to include natural as well as built heritage.</li> </ul>
<b>The Inner North West Design Principles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The three overarching design principles have been removed and the 10 principles are listed and text and images amended to reflect feedback, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated open spaces map</li> <li>• Additional north-south and east-west links</li> <li>• Identification of additional heritage buildings</li> <li>• Identification of public land as key opportunity sites</li> <li>• Amended working of 4.6 to: Mixed uses to support city centre living</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combined Strong Street hierarchy and Active frontages</li> <li>• Updated heading 4.9 to 'Provide appropriate public parking'</li> <li>• Updated heading 4.10 to 'Support public transport'</li> <li>• Urban design principles summary updated in light of the cumulative changes</li> </ul>
<b>Streets and Building Types</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detail on the names of streets, roads and lanes provided</li> <li>• Enhanced text in relation to sustainable development, including reducing the impact of construction, carbon savings, habitat creation and use of bio-diverse rooftops.</li> <li>• Reference to Shared Space Principles</li> </ul>
<b>Character Areas and Streets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text amended for Castle Street and King Street Character Area to include Bank Buildings. New design for King Street proposed</li> <li>• Text of Bank Square updated to reflect responses</li> <li>• References to heights removed and aligned with text from the draft Plan Strategy in relation to density</li> <li>• Union Square Character Area amended as Union Street Public space with accompanying updated text</li> </ul>
<b>Making it happen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional delivery point added referring to the Bank Buildings and potential regeneration projects to encourage development to address the physical environment, economic development and connectivity</li> </ul>