

## Preface [Volume I of Urban Environment]

The Department commissioned consultants [**Urban Initiatives**] to carry out various studies including the assessment of the adequacy of existing urban design policy, primarily within the city and town centres, of the major urban areas within the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan area. The consultants also carried out more detailed studies along Belfast's arterial routes and within several discrete within inner urban Belfast. As a follow up to the assessment of existing policy, the consultants produced a series of recommendations for appropriate new policy guidance. Finally, the consultants carried out detailed appraisals of two key sites within the Plan Area [West Lisburn new 'Employment/industrial' site and Titanic Quarter brownfield '] to produce appropriate development frameworks. The purpose of all the studies was to inform the new Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan [BMAP] 2015.

The studies carried out may be summarised as follows:

- Urban design study to assess the adequacy of existing urban design policy and to recommend appropriate new policy guidance for the centres of the larger urban areas viz. Belfast, Lisburn, Bangor, Holywood, Carrickfergus, Carryduff and Ballyclare as well as in respect of Belfast arterial routes;
- Urban design studies to assess the adequacy of existing urban design policy and to recommend appropriate new policy guidance for three discrete urban areas within Belfast viz. Dunbar Link, Eastbank and Great Victoria Station;
- Detailed appraisals of two key sites within the Plan area [West Lisburn new 'Employment/industrial' site and the Titanic Quarter] to produce appropriate development frameworks.

The consultant's reports and findings, which took into account guidance outlined in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 and in Planning Policy Statement 1 General Principles, are contained within this Technical Supplement Volume II and have informed the Plan-making process. The Department has given careful consideration to the consultants' findings and has resolved in the main to follow their advice.

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November 2004

## Executive Summary

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The surrounding suburbs and towns around Belfast have experienced significant growth in recent times. Many of the towns have extensive suburban areas and there is some pressure for further development. Unfortunately, in some instances, the 'suburbanisation' of the surrounding towns has led to a deteriorated town centre [Refer to Part 4 of the Urban Design Strategy]. The city of Lisburn is one of the most recent cities in the region. The city centre has been defined by the historical pattern of development in the area. However, edge sites surrounding the city core present opportunities to develop a compact centre which integrates transport functions, living and amenity [Refer to Part 4 of the Urban Design Strategy].

#### The Future Belfast Metropolitan Area: Developing a Vision

Having come to an understanding of the general context of the area, the next key question is 'What kind of area do we want this to be?'. This question forms the basis of the methodology in the Urban Design Strategy in that it requires us to define the 'qualities' of the future Metropolitan area, and on this basis, set out clear objectives to achieve these qualities [Refer to Part 1 of the Urban Design Strategy]. The development of this strategy has been the result of ongoing consultation with the Department of Environment Northern Ireland, key stakeholders and Government Departments. All consultations reveal that the Belfast Metropolitan area should be a place of excellence, world class, exciting, vibrant and yet capable of providing the facilities that are necessary for day to day life. On this basis, we have identified 7 key qualities for the Belfast Metropolitan area:

- It should be a place with character and distinctiveness. It should promote development which responds to locally distinctive patterns in the landscape and townscape to create a place which is unique, special and identifiable. [character and distinctiveness]
- It should be an area which builds on its urban tradition. Urban areas are typically defined by a continuity of street enclosure. There is a clear distinction between what is private and what is public. The public areas are surrounded by buildings and well arranged planting

to create clear structure and enclosure. [continuity and enclosure]

- It should be an area with a high quality public realm, good streets and squares, places for people to enjoy. [public realm]
- It should be well connected. It should be relatively easy for people to move from one area to another easily and efficiently, without having to use the car. It should put people before traffic. [connectivity and permeability]
- It should be an area which has a range of opportunities and choices. It should be characterised by a diversity of buildings, places and activities, a mix of compatible uses that work together to create lively, successful places. [diversity and choice]
- It should be a place which can adapt to changing circumstances, social, economic and physical. [adaptability]
- It should be a place where all the various parts work together to become an integrated and efficient physical form. [Integration and efficiency]

#### The Tools: Making successful 'urban places'

Translating vision into action is the key challenge for this Urban Design Strategy. To assist in this task, we have developed a set of tools which will help to break the process down into manageable and understandable parts. There are 4 key tools:

Firstly, the scale of the area is broken down into understandable areas. For instance, Belfast City is broken down into streets and character areas, as well as gateways, nodes and arterial routes. Secondly, detailed urban design objectives are defined for each of the component areas. These objectives are based on the aspects of a successful place. 'By Design-Towards Better Practice in the Planning System' sets out these aspects of form as follows:

- Urban Structure

This is the framework of routes and spaces that connect the local area and more widely. It refers to the way developments, routes and open spaces connect to one another.

- Urban Grain

This refers to the pattern of physical elements in the city, specifically development blocks, the subdivision of the blocks (also referred to as the pattern of 'plots'), and the arrangement of buildings in the block.

- Density and Mix

The amount of development on a given piece of land and the range of uses. Density influences the intensity of development, and in combination with the mix of uses, can influence the vitality and viability of a place.

- Scale: Height and Massing

Scale is the size of a building in relation to its surroundings. Height can be expressed in a number of ways, for instance, number of floors or storeys, total measured height, height relative to width etc. Massing is the combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings in relation to other buildings and spaces.

- Public Realm

The public realm is the area used by the public for public activities. It includes footpaths, squares, lanes and streets. The public realm is vital to the public life of the city.

Thirdly, clear concepts for the structuring of the urban form need to be developed. The concepts need to be based on an understanding of the processes which will drive the development of the new urban structure. These processes include access to public transport, public space resources, available sites, highway improvements etc.

Finally, on the basis of the previous points, detailed recommendations for action are formulated. These recommendations set out the key actions in terms of the aspects of successful places, and are supplemented with drawings as appropriate.

## Overview of Key Recommendations

### (a) Belfast City

Belfast is a changing city. It's city centre is forward looking, reflected in the growing number of restaurants, bars and shops in the central area. To build on this momentum, and strengthen its base as the key city in Northern Ireland, it is recommended that the city consolidate its centre, and build on its compactness as a key element of character and competitiveness.

A compact city is a walkable city, a city that is easy to get to and move around. The existing public transport infrastructure in the city presents opportunities for future development. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan are reviewing options for the city, which include developments at Central Station, Great Victoria Street Station and Gamble Street. A rapid transit system is also proposed for the city centre, connecting some of the key quarters and connecting the city with Belfast City Airport. To capitalise on these proposals, it is proposed to concentrate city growth into three key growth nodes, focused around the public transport stations of Central, Great Victoria Street and Gamble Street. A study has been undertaken of the catchment of these areas to establish potential development sites, and on this basis estimate the potential scale of new development.

Having established the strategy for growth, a set of concepts have been developed to illustrate how the structure of the city can be consolidated. The 6 key concepts are set out overleaf.

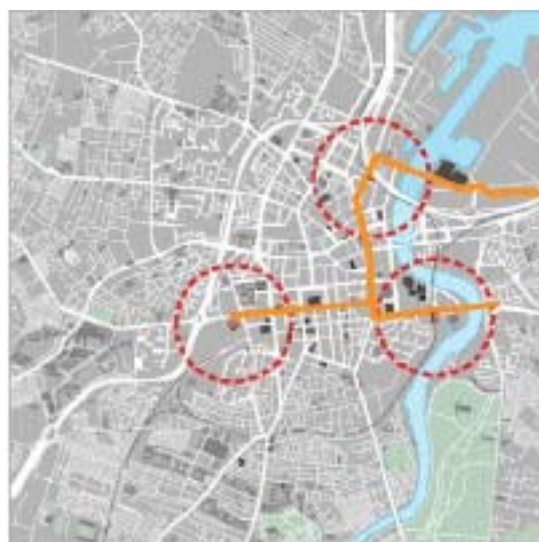
### Special Projects

The high accessibility nodes of Central Station, Gamble Street, and Great Victoria Street present opportunities for significant urban restructuring. Three projects areas have been identified to capitalise on this opportunity:

- Grosvenor Road and Great Victoria Street
- The Dunbar Link
- Laganside East

For each area, development sites are identified and an appropriate urban structure is proposed, along with suggested movement strategy and building heights.

(a) Concentrate growth into the areas of highest accessibility as discussed above



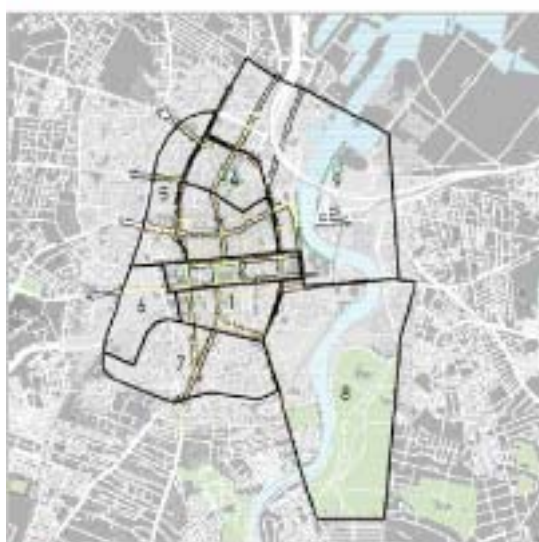
>Above High Accessibility Zones

(c) Develop the Civic spine, connecting the Waterfront Hall to Donegall Square and the Belfast Academical Institute, as the key street in the city



>Above Civic Spine

(e) Develop an understanding of the various character areas in the city. Promote development which builds on this diversity.



>Above Character Areas

(b) Enclose the city centre with a grand, tree planted boulevard. This boulevard will act as a linking element and provide a distinct image to the city core. The boulevard will help to restructure the western edge of the city in particular and act as a catalyst for new, higher quality development, together with proposed improvements in public transport and highway works.



>Above City Centre Ring

(d) Develop the 'Belfast Cross' as the key retail core in the city centre. This cross of streets includes Bedford Street/Dublin Road, Donegall Place/Royal Avenue and Castle Street/High Street



>Above 'The Belfast Cross'

(f) Develop guidance for the arterial routes. These routes contain a number of key city gateways. These points define the entry into the city centre. There are also a number of nodes along the arterial routes. Typically, these nodes have developed as neighbourhood centres.



On the basis of these concepts, a series of guidance for each of the character areas, and key streets is set out. In broad terms, the guidance recommends the following:

- The structure of the city should be compact, with a clear definition of the city centre and the gateways into this area from the surrounding routes. The proposed urban structure proposes a number of measures to address the damage of the past, particularly in terms of infrastructure and inappropriate development.
- That the city centre be defined by a mix of uses, typically high density, with access to excellent public transport facilities.
- New mixed use areas should develop to the north east, taking advantage of the river location and historical context, and on the north west side, taking account of key gateways into the city and proposed public transport improvements.
- The southern section of the city should generally reinforce its largely mixed residential form and character.
- This strategy is reflected in the heights and massing proposed. In general terms, higher buildings should be concentrated in the city centre, along key streets, at key entrance points, gateways and nodes. Taller buildings can also be used to mark key corners or local nodal points. It is important to note that there are a variety of building heights proposed, and that these building heights relate to a number of factors, including the existing contextual height, the qualities we see for the street, the location of the building, and the function of the building or place. No blanket height has been set for the city centre. In this, careful regard should be given to the guidance, to identify the permissible building heights for each area.
- A high quality public realm is proposed across the city core, with a public realm of world class, and excellence focused on the key streets, the civic spine and the riverside areas.

#### (b) Arterial Routes

The arterial routes are the key routes into the city. They are important connections between the city and surrounding districts and regions. Eighteen arterial routes are identified in the plan, distributed across all sides of the city. Although the routes vary in length, they are all important at local and wider scales. There are clear differences in character along the arterial routes, and these differences contribute to the identity of these areas. Given the pattern of development along the routes, many similar problems have occurred, particularly in the zone closest to the city centre where road infrastructure in particular has damaged the neighbourhood and urban qualities of these routes.

Each of the arterial routes were surveyed to identify the key elements of character, and to identify the opportunities for improvement in terms of public realm and new development. In addition, each of the nodes and gateways along the routes were surveyed, and guidance provided on appropriate form of development, and building heights.

(c) Surrounding city and towns

The broad recommendations for each of the towns is set out as follows [Please refer to Section 4 for detailed guidance]:

Ballyclare

- Marking the entry into the town with an appropriate, high quality public realm treatment.
- Strengthen the role of the existing main street.
- Develop the amenity of the town square.
- Develop links into potential development lands to the north east of the town. These links should develop as a system of streets and spaces.
- Enhance the amenity of the river and adjacent open spaces.



- Town Boundary
- Existing key frontage
- Existing Open space
- Existing Water body
- Key buildings
- Mark key gateway
- Strengthen public realm along key streets
- Redevelopment Opportunity site identified by BMAP
- Key gap site
- Strengthen key structural streets
- Develop new frontage
- Proposed street tree planting along key streets/approach roads
- Pedestrian linkages
- Review highway design. Seek pedestrian friendly junction design to cater for two way traffic. High quality of treatment to public realm.

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- Define the town centre through the promotion of an urban form of development. In particular, seek the development of a new town square at the intersection of the key routes.
- Enhance the character of the approach roads through a programme of planting and public realm improvements.
- Promote an urban form of development on all development sites in the town centre.



- Key
- Town Boundary
  - Existing key frontage
  - Existing Open space
  - Existing Water body
  - Key buildings
  - Mark key gateway
  - Public realm improvements to key streets
  - Redevelopment Opportunity site identified by BMAP
  - Key gap site
  - Develop new frontage
  - Proposed street tree planting along approach roads
  - Potential new linkages to key development sites

### Carrickfergus

- Develop a waterfront boulevard to connect the town centre and the castle, and riverside amenity.
- Strengthen the structure of the existing town centre through the promotion of an appropriate urban form of development on all development sites.
- Strengthen the character of the town centre through a programme of public realm works.
- Develop regular, safe and pleasant pedestrian crossings between the town centre and the waterfront.
- Develop the amenity of the waterfront area by balancing the needs of highway works, parking, amenity and new development.



- Town Boundary
- Existing key frontage
- Existing Open space
- Existing Water body
- Key buildings
- Mark key gateway
- Strengthen public realm along key streets
- Redevelopment Opportunity site identified by BMAP
- Key gap site
- Infill opportunity
- Opportunity site for development of large floorplate shopping/retail
- Develop new frontage
- Proposed street tree planting along key streets/approach roads
- Pedestrian linkages
- Develop amenity of waterfront area. Retain views to castle.
- Potential linkages into development sites
- Develop waterfront boulevard

### Bangor

- Strengthen the role of the main street by promoting appropriate infill and redevelopment, highway improvements and public realm improvements.
- Link the rail station and the town centre, and the town centre and the waterside.
- Develop the amenity of the waterfront.
- Mark key gateways and nodes leading into the town centre.
- Develop strong pedestrian connections between the town centre and the waterfront area.



- Town Boundary
- Existing key frontage
- Existing Open space
- Existing Water body
- Key buildings
- Mark key gateway
- Strengthen public realm along key streets
- Redevelopment Opportunity site identified by BMAP
- Key gap site
- Strengthen key structural streets
- Develop new frontage
- Proposed street tree planting along key streets/approach roads
- Pedestrian linkages
- Review highway design. Seek pedestrian friendly junction design to cater for two way traffic. High quality of treatment to public realm.

### Holywood

- Strengthen street frontage to A2 to create coherent image to town edge
- Develop under-utilised sites for urban infill. Promote active frontages onto all streets. New infill to strengthen street structure
- Develop sequence of pedestrian priority spaces connecting with a redeveloped Redburn Square



- Town Boundary
- Existing Open space
- Existing Water body
- Key buildings
- Mark key gateway
- Redevelopment Opportunity site identified by BMAP Potential
- future gap site
- Develop new primary frontage to Holywood By-pass
- New street frontage to streets and public spaces
- Develop landmark building on corner
- Explore opportunity to develop frontage to carpark with arched access to rear parking area
- Proposed street tree planting along Holywood By-pass edge
- Proposed public realm improvements to Redburn Square
- Shared surface area
- Develop market square
- Develop courtyard
- Potential parking court
- Pedestrian access Primary vehicular access

### Lisburn City

- Define the southern edge of the city with a well planted avenue.
- Mark the key gateways into the city centre from the approach roads.
- Promote pedestrian movement and priority in the town centre.
- Promote the development of the southern edge as an urban infill opportunity with a mix of uses and high quality urban design.



- Key**
- Town Boundary
  - Existing key frontage
  - Existing Open space
  - Existing Water body
  - Key buildings
  - Mark key gateway
  - Mark key node/public space with appropriate public realm treatment
  - Strengthen public realm on existing key streets
  - Develop high street in terms of public realm treatment and building enclosure
  - Redevelopment Opportunity site identified by BMAP Key gap site
  - Develop new frontage
  - Proposed street tree planting along key streets/approach roads
  - Pedestrian linkages