

Response to the DRD Public Consultation regarding York Street Interchange June 2011

Recommendations

1

The planning of the new infrastructure to be considered as a strategic urban design project, not as a 'roads only' project. The repair of the urban structure of inner North Belfast should be at the heart of this. There is also a wider principle for the city, of increasing pedestrian movement and creating a more human environment.

Action

The government ministers in charge of the DRD, DSD, DOE and DCAL, along with Belfast City Council, should jointly appoint a multi-disciplinary team to take a strategic view of the scheme within the local area, securing agreement from all relevant statutory bodies and specifically engaging with the Roads Service consultants to create a wider 'brief' centred on urban design. The team should be formed as a horizontal interdisciplinary structure to ensure coordination of actions and the implementation of a mutually supportive policy approach.

2

The final scheme should ensure that the 'Six Links', as defined by the Forum for Alternative Belfast (map published on the 31st May 2011), are a key part of the urban design solution.

Action

The infrastructure design should allow, not hinder, the future development of these critical links, permitting the surroundings to return to pedestrian and cycle friendly streets inhabited by people both living and working in the area. An authoritative independent pedestrian access consultant should be appointed to ensure best practice and to make certain that all user needs are addressed. Proposals should include a strategy for biodiversity to protect green land.

3

The infrastructure scheme should include two bridges linking the North Belfast communities to the emerging education and employment opportunities in the adjacent Titanic Quarter. Links 'within' the city are every bit as important as links 'through' the city.

Action

These proposals should be included as an integral part of an overall scheme, and the bridge structures should be designed as visually obvious river crossings.

4

The streets and slip roads should be designed to the latest national public realm and transportation standards and not merely to "road and bridge" standards.

Action

Manual for Streets 2 to be adopted as the design standard

5

Options B and D should be discarded.

Reason

The impact of an 18 m high motorway flyover with heavy vehicles driving through the city at the height of a 6 storey building would permanently sever North Belfast's communities from the emerging education and employment opportunities in the city centre and the Titanic Quarter.

6

Only an improved version of Option C offers opportunity to address the fractured urban structure of this part of Belfast

Action

An amended version of Option C should be developed with the proposed multi-disciplinary group. The amended scheme should include a buried Bangor/Westlink connection, allowing the release of more development land and allowing Great George's Street to be restored as a calmed street shaped by buildings and footpaths.

7

The overall scheme should be subject to a MAG Design Review and to its recommendations

Reason

This project is a Built Environment project within the Architecture and Built Environment Policy to which all government departments must adhere. DRD is not an exception. This significant development is an integral part of the city which should be required to benefit the whole city as a functioning system, rather than facilitating 'roads' whilst severing and debilitating local places. This proposal is particularly important given the location within the inner city and directly adjacent to a number of city neighbourhoods, and should be an exemplar of a fully integrated urban design.