

27 June 2008

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

Re: Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village Draft Regeneration Framework

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed Framework.

In January 2007, we submitted a desktop Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as a response to the *North West Quarter Part 2: Baseline Issues Report*, which concerned broadly the same area as this Framework. We believe that the points and arguments made within this response remain valid. Therefore, we enclose the report and would ask that it is considered again as our response to the Framework.

We would like to highlight some key points, which are discussed in more detail in the full Health Impact Assessment report.

- We strongly welcome the proposal to develop walkable neighbourhoods and improve pedestrian and cyclist links within, to and from the area. Such actions have the potential to improve health and wellbeing, by encouraging physical activity and social interaction, as well as by reducing the need for motorized travel. However, we note that public transport is not mentioned and would urge DSD to work with DRD and Translink to ensure that people in 'city fringe' areas have access to bus links. See page 4 of HIA report.
- We also welcome proposals to enhance the tenure and use mix of the area to support the economic and social regeneration of the area. In particular the proposal to convert warehouses in the Press'Library Quarter to starter and incubator business units has potential to revitalize the area and offer new employment opportunities. Opportunities to support social enterprises and independent traders as part of such initiatives should be

explored, in order to maximize benefits to the local community and economy. See page 9-10 of the full report.

- While we see benefit in developing the evening economy of the area, we would emphasise that an economy focused around alcohol and fast food outlets has displaced negative costs, in the long term in the form of ill health but in the short term very directly on the health care services and police.
- We would also stress the importance of mixed tenure and ensuring access to affordable housing within the area, in order to avoid the negative impacts of gentrification, such as displacement of people and social problems. It is also important to consider the current situation in the housing market and assess the demand for different types of housing accordingly, ie. consider the demand and need for high specification apartments versus the need for middle range family housing. See page 6 of the report.
- We would also emphasise the need to engage with other stakeholders and the local community, in order to tackle social exclusion effectively. Physical regeneration plays an important part in improving the built environment and setting parameters for regeneration, but alone will not solve deep rooted issues linked to primarily social and economic factors, which we are pleased to see are identified in the Framework. We believe the local community should have a central say in the suggested 'catalytic regeneration projects' and a gateway development at the junction of Carrick Hill/Millfield and Peter's Hill/North Street. See page 8 of the full report.
- Finally, we would stress that it is important to take forward plans for this area in a way that ensures complementarity and continuation with the regeneration plans for the adjacent area, including the former Crumlin Road.Girdwood Barracks site, the Belfast City Centre Westside Regeneration District and the lower Shankill area.

If you have any queries regarding the response or the Health Impact Assessment, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

Joan Devlin
Programme Director