

Blackstaff Square area Access Strategy

May 2023

Rationale & Overview

A Linen Quarter wide access study was initiated in Summer 2022 to address concerns from hospitality and entertainment venues located in the District, in relation to lack of designated road infrastructure for delivery services and customer drop-off/pick-up services.

In the last five years £180m¹ has been invested into Linen Quarter hotels and venues. This includes major refurbishments and/or extensions (including Leonardos (formerly Jurys Inn), Fitzwilliam, Europa, Clayton, Holiday Inn, Ten Square and the Grand Opera House) plus brand new hotels at the Grand Central, Maldron, and Hampton by Hilton.

Unfortunately, there has not been a corresponding investment in road infrastructure and public realm to facilitate these new requirements. This report aims to collate information from hospitality and entertainment venues located in the Linen Quarter to create a comprehensive overview of all issues relating to vehicular access to and from these businesses.

For this purpose, Linen Quarter BID have been directly engaging (facility) managers of hotels and large venues to reflect their views. Face-to-face conversations with ten out of thirteen businesses located within the Linen Quarter BID area were held between 13th and 27th June. Findings and recommendations in relation to the Blackstaff Square area – the area between Bedford St, Howard St and Great Victoria Street – that resulted from these conversations have been collated in this document.

Linen Quarter Vision

Building upon its Regeneration Vision (published in 2019), the Linen Quarter BID is actively working to establish the Linen Quarter as Northern Ireland's first Sustainable Urban District. These aspirations include building standards, green architecture and the redesign of the public realm. The BID's sustainability agenda puts heavy emphasis on the (re)development of the road infrastructure within the district to facilitate a shift from private car use to more sustainable forms of transport, e.g., zero emission public transport vehicles and cycling/walking.

Proposals, such as the introduction of district-wide 20mph speed limits or the establishment of low-traffic neighbourhoods (e.g. the SuperBlock model > see [LQ Superblock - Linen Quarter BID](#)), have already been put forward by the BID. However, these proposals are focused on reducing generic city centre traffic and are predicated on the need to maintain and enhance access for other road users – including business deliveries, waste management, taxis, coaches, public transport, residents and those with mobility issues. This study will help to inform some of these requirements, with a specific focus on the first three issues.

¹ Based on figures provided by NIHF

Economic Impact of LQ Hotel sector

The Northern Ireland hotel sector has historically been underrated in terms of its contribution to the economy, but the long term growth in tourism has emphasised the importance of the sector to maintaining Northern Ireland's economic performance.

This is particularly true for the Linen Quarter, where approximately 11% of property NAV (net asset value) can be attributed to the hotel sector, generating an estimated £2.4m in annual rates. The Linen Quarter (including May Street / Donegall Square South / Howard Street) is home to 12 out of 36 Belfast hotels and hosts more than 2300 hotel rooms, which represent more than half of the city's available stock of hotel rooms and almost 25% of Northern Ireland's stock².

Figure 1. Linen Quarter BID management area with hotels and large venues highlighted

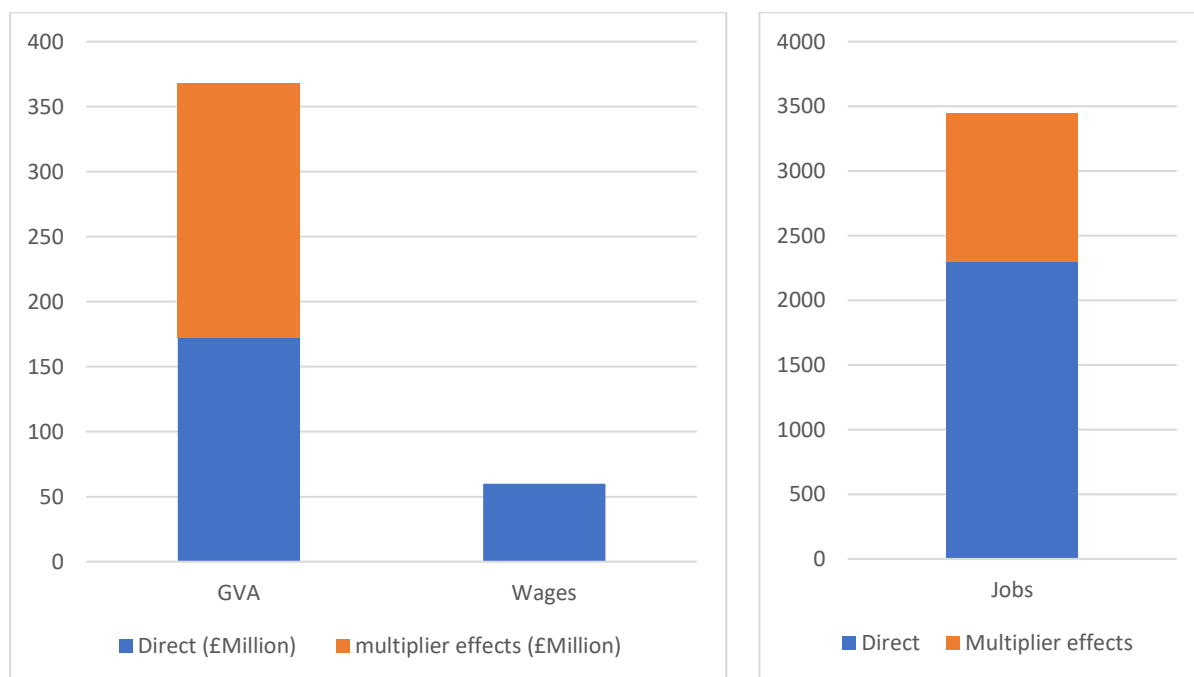


² Based on 2022 figures provided by NIHF

When the Linen Quarter’s share of hotel rooms is extrapolated to the Northern Ireland hotel sector’s GVA, the 12 hotels based in the Linen Quarter would generate around £172.5m direct GVA³, while sustaining around 2,300 jobs that generate almost £60m in direct wages⁴. Taking into consideration multiplier effects such as purchase of goods and services as well as wages spent in the local economy, the Linen Quarter hotel sector generates another £196m in GVA⁵ and sustains an additional 1,150 jobs⁶.

When it comes to the economic value of coach tourism to the Belfast hotel sector alone, estimates based on data provided by three hotels in the Linen Quarter suggest that on average 16% of hotel capacity is taken up by coach tourism, representing £25m+ in revenue generated for the Linen Quarter hotel sector.

Figure 2: Economic impact of Linen Quarter Hotel sector



³ Based on 2019 figures provided by NIHF

⁴ Based on estimates provided by NIHF

⁵ Based on 'Hotel Expansion in Northern Ireland' report (NIHF, 2017)

⁶ Based on estimates provided by NIHF

ACCESS STUDY RESULTS

Please note: the findings and recommendations below relate to the Blackstaff Square area – the area between Bedford St, Howard St and Great Victoria Street.

Issues

1. Difficulties in getting large groups of guests to and from hotels due to lack of dedicated short-term parking space for coaches;
2. There is lack of facilities for long-stay coach parking;
3. Existing James Street South layout does not cope with current two way traffic flow, often leading to traffic deadlock and queues. On-street car parking arrangements contribute to this situation;
4. Existing Franklin Street layout does not cope with current two way traffic flow, regularly leading to traffic deadlock and queues. On-street car parking arrangements contribute to this situation;
5. Existing Bedford Street layout (e.g. traffic island in front of Grand Central Hotel) can lead to traffic deadlock when coaches are parked in front of the Hotel;
6. The narrow profile of Amelia Street makes it difficult for large coaches to access the front of Maldron Hotel;
7. Shortage of dedicated loading bays – leading to clogged up streets;

Suggested Interventions

1. Introduction of coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street to service both Maldron Hotel and Grand Central;
2. Relaxation of parking time limits for coaches decanting / picking up hotel guests to allow for a 30 minutes timeframe for on-street parking
3. Erection of a dedicated large-scale parking facility on the edge of city centre that would provide coach operators with a secure over-night parking option for their drivers;
4. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and eastbound through James Street South AND/OR removal of on street car parking in James Street South;
5. **A.** Swift reopening of McClintock Street and introduction of one-way loop system westbound through Clarence Street > McClintock Street > and eastbound through Franklin Street;
B. Removal of on-street car parking bays on southside of Franklin Street (between Blackstaff Sq and Bedford St) and introduction of westbound cycle lane.
6. Introduction of a Linen Quarter wide 20mph zone and reconsideration of need for traffic island on Bedford Street;
7. Introduction of coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street to service Maldron Hotel;
8. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of loading bay and disabled parking bays alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to

8. Lack of dedicated drop-off spaces for blue badge holders and taxis;

replace current northbound lane). Extended pavement to cover all current on-street parking bays on West side of Brunswick Street;

9. Introduction of a traffic filtering system in Amelia St to prevent through traffic on Amelia Street. Access to and from Keyland's Place will be maintained through Blackstaff square.

Linen Quarter wide recommendation:

- Introduction of a 20mph zone across the Linen Quarter BID area.

Edinburg case study

Between 2016-2018, 20mph limits were implemented in Edinburgh's city centre, main shopping streets and residential areas in a bid to cut accidents, encourage more walking and cycling and create more pleasant neighbourhoods.

As part of the 'Is 20 Plenty for Health' research project, pre- and post-implementation comparisons were conducted on a range of data. The study found that as a result of the implementation of the 20mph speed limits in 66 streets the following outcomes were achieved:

- The mean and median speeds reduced by 1.34 mph; decrease of 134 vehicles per week 3 years post implementation;
- There was a 40% reduction in number of collisions and a 39% drop in casualties;
- There was a significant increase in mean liveability score (based on 9 components e.g. places / transport / pavements).



Figure 1: map showing location of proposed interventions

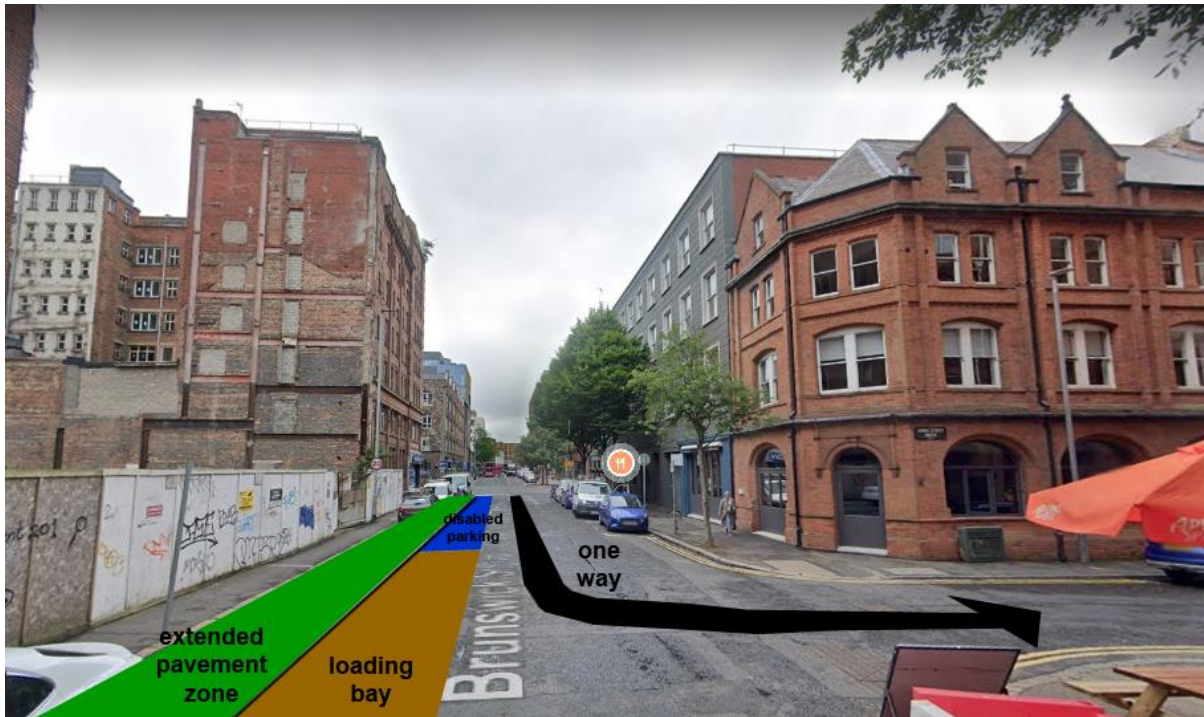


Figure 2: impression of proposed interventions on Brunswick Street (view looking North)

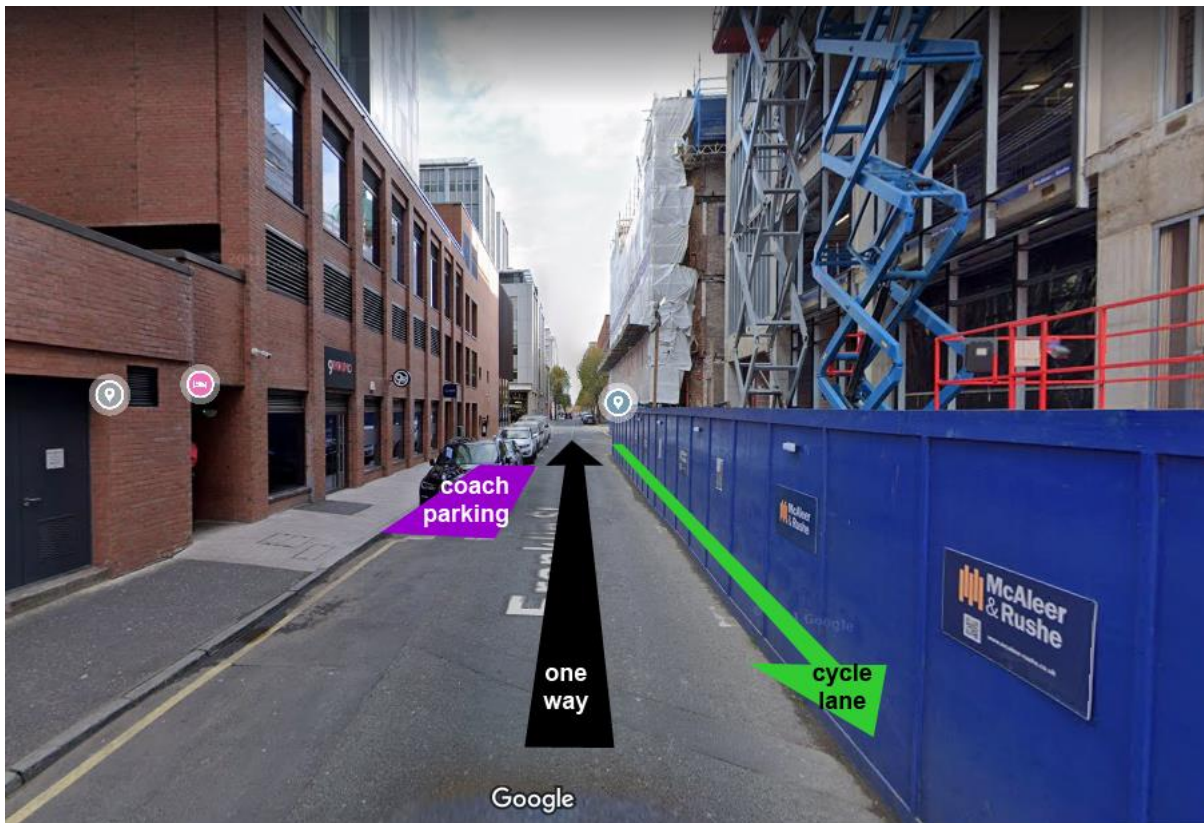


Figure 3: impression of proposed interventions on Franklin Street (view looking East)

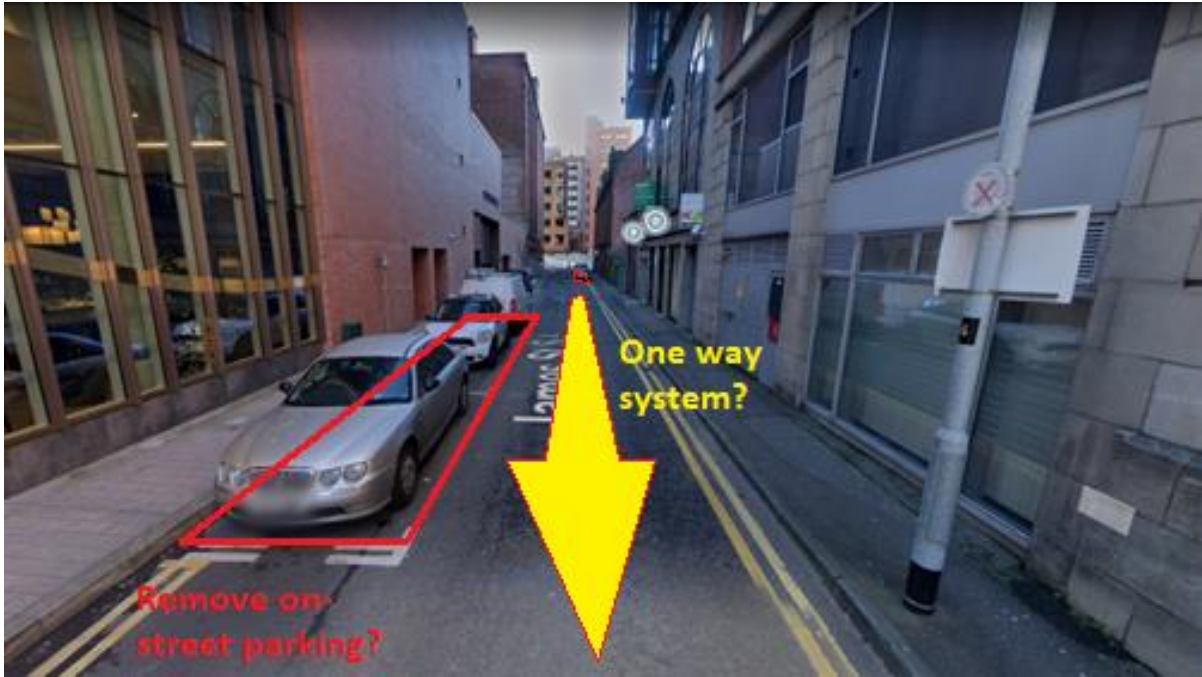


Figure 4: impression of proposed interventions on James Street South (view looking West)



Figure 5: impression of proposed interventions on Amelia Street (view looking West)