

## **LQ BID - Consultation response**

LQ BID support the rationale and four guiding principles of the 'Bolder Vision'. We think it is right that the vision concentrates on no more than four themes, as additional themes will dilute focus. However, we would like to see sustainability and climate resilience given a stronger cross-cutting emphasis throughout the document. For example, we would like to see inclusion of Sustainable Urban Drainage throughout the city centre, and the incorporation of new sustainable building regulations and space standards for future residential development.

### **Creation of a Civic Spine with a Focus on People**

LQ BID support the transformational proposal to create a Civic Spine and prioritise this for walking, cycling and public transport. We think a new city centre boundary that stretches between the two Universities is the right approach for Belfast's future development and helps bookend the city experience between two vibrant areas - from the proposed Belfast Stories attraction and Cathedral Gardens in the North, to the existing Botanic Park and Queen's Quarter attractions in the South. At a later date the Civic Spine should be rebadged with a customer focused name and identity, to help create a widely recognised corridor and a city experience in its own right.

The Civic Spine should have defined purpose to improve accessibility / connectivity, support retail and hospitality, and encourage active travel and sustainable tourism. The Spine should help showcase Belfast's built environment and to encourage new green space in the city centre.



## **Transport issues**

LQ BID support the proposal to significantly reduce on-street surface car parking and repurpose the roadway for wider pedestrian boulevards and social space. Although this facilitates much greater space for people it does not always require full pedestrian. Consideration for dedicated cycle lanes and public transport connections on key streets should also be considered.

All surface car parks in the city centre, including many owned by the public sector, should be repurposed for higher density development. There are important exceptions for surface parking and appropriate consideration should be made for disabled parking bays, taxi ranks, and sufficient provision of loading bays (with defined access rights for deliveries).

However, we need to ensure that the City Centre remains accessible to those travelling by private car, including those from rural areas where public transport is more challenging. Overall parking provision should not be reduced: on-street car parking should be replaced with new multi-story car parks within walking distance of the city centre, and/or park and ride provision on the outskirts of the city. All new parking facilities should include electric charging points.

Examples from other cities who have removed parking from their city centres should be noted:

- Copenhagen took a staged approach to reducing city centre car parking, which gave time for people to re-orientate to the new environment and change their travel habits (NB: the main shopping street, Stroget, also experienced a 35% increase in footfall in the first year following pedestrianisation).
- Barcelona's low traffic Superblocks took 10 years to develop, but they first improved public transport before reducing car access (and we believe Belfast is already on this journey with a new Transport Hub, North-South Glider, and the promise of improved cycling infrastructure).

### **Specific considerations for Linen & Queen's Quarters:**

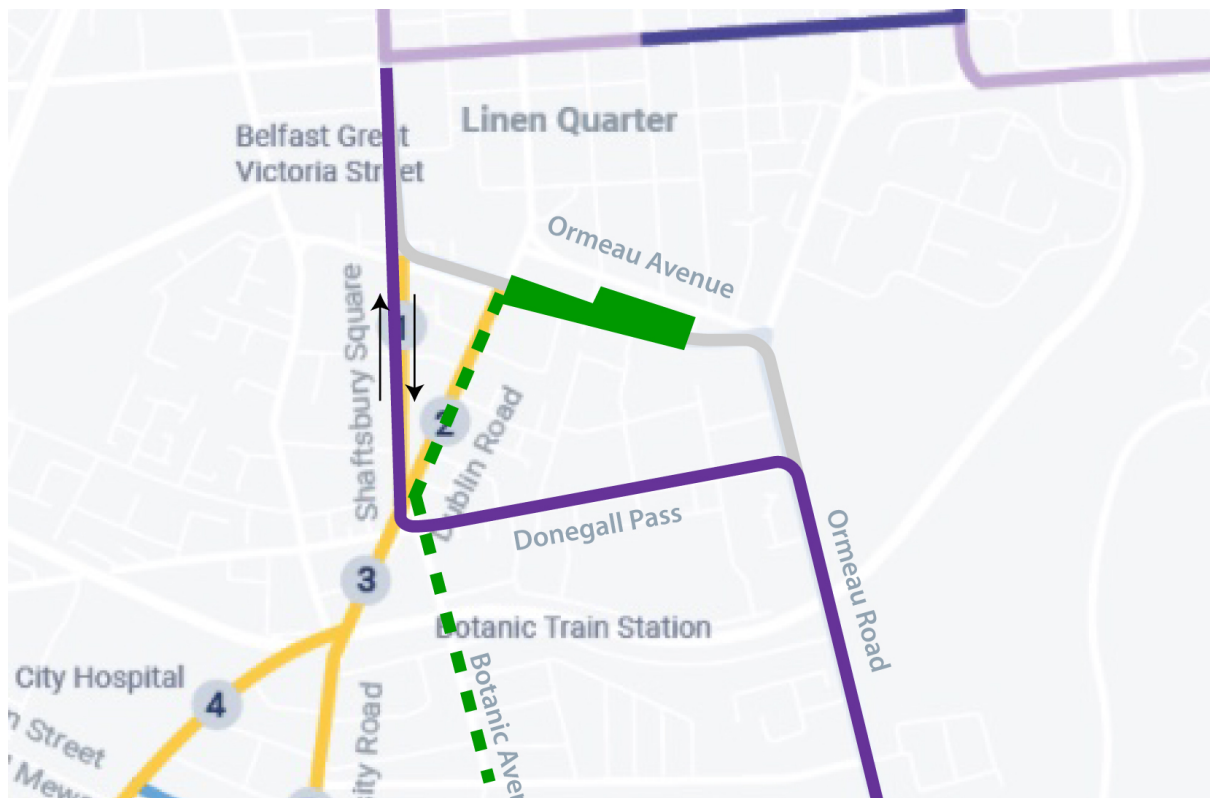
LQ BID support the route of the Civic Spine through Bedford Street, Dublin Road, and Botanic Avenue. Car use should be minimised along these streets and surface car parking removed (apart from exceptions noted in the transport section above). Specific changes could include:

- Bedford Street should be reduced to one northbound lane (Adelaide St in contrast should be one southbound lane)
- Dublin Road could be repurposed for pedestrian / social space with a new two-way cycle lane.
- Shaftesbury Square should be completely repurposed, with the Eastern side converted into pedestrian walkways (that provide greater accessibility to Botanic Avenue / Queen's Quarter) and new social space (outdoor cafe / pocket park). The

western side dedicated to two-way motor traffic, joining roadways running in both directions along University Road and Great Victoria Street.

- Botanic Avenue will retain its current two-way traffic, but on-street parking will be removed and pedestrian & social space increased.

To support these changes the south section of Great Victoria Street should be repurposed for two-way traffic. In this scenario the North-South Glider will run both directions the full length of Great Victoria Street, Shaftesbury Square, and Donegall Pass before joining the Ormeau Road corridor. Zero emission buses will complete this transition to a greener transport network.



### **Linen Quarter Superblock / Lincenhall Street**

LQ BID will be making a separate submission to propose a superblock in the district. This will create a low traffic neighbourhood, improve the residential experience, improve residential opportunities, and develop interventions to support the vitality of the business area. The concept includes the proposal to pedestrianise Lincenhall Street and repurpose it for high quality residential and business benefit. Under this scenario Lincenhall Street could also be integrated in the wider Civic Spine proposal.

## Built Environment

LQ BID are keen to use the Civic Spine to celebrate and showcase architectural heritage and major public buildings e.g., Ulster Hall, Broadcasting House, and public sculpture such as Flying Figures at Shaftesbury Square. The Civic Spine could facilitate new lighting schemes for the exterior of selected buildings - as part of the Council's lighting strategy - along with enhanced public realm.

## Pocket Parks

We are particularly keen to create a new pocket park and civic space at the Thomas Thompson fountain, connecting the traffic island to the pavement outside broadcasting house, renewing the fountain, and incorporating new seating and planting. We have already discussed this idea as part of the Streets Ahead V consultation, and we note a similar idea for a pocket park outside the BBC was included in the Council's 2016 Linen Quarter Vision. The idea could be extended under the Civic Spine to include the current surface car park at the rear of the BBC.



We also propose a linear playpark running along Bankmore Street (potentially to support new housing for Ormeau Avenue, as well as existing housing at Donegall Pass) and a new pocket park / outdoor cafe at Shaftesbury Square.

These ideas will help create a network of small parks running along the South side of the Civic Spine: City Hall Gardens > Thomas Thompson Pocket Park > Bankmore Linear Play Park > Shaftesbury Square Pocket Park / Outdoor Cafe > Crescent Gardens > Botanic Park.

## **Economic Development & Sustainable Tourism**

The Civic Spine could help boost economic development. A high quality and accessible built environment will attract greater footfall to support retail and create new outdoor trading space to support hospitality. A vibrant area with high quality public realm will also support business recruitment & retention, foreign direct investment, and sustainable tourism (i.e., with a greater emphasis on exploring the city on foot, or by bike hire / public transport).

LQ BID have already started to promote South Belfast as a renewed 'Golden Mile' of arts, culture, and hospitality. Our work has connected 70 hospitality venues and 20 high quality attractions / points of interest - including City Hall, Ulster Hall, Grand Opera House, Crown Bar, Empire Music Hall, Crescent Gardens, Queen's Film Theatre, Queen's University / Naughton Gallery, Botanic Park / Palm House / Tropical Ravine, and Ulster Museum. However, the experience is seriously compromised by the poor-quality public realm and fractured pedestrian experience - something that Streets Ahead V and the Civic Spine will help address.

## **Civic Spine Proposed Interventions**

- LQ BID supports the vision to transform the Linen Quarter into a people focused sustainable district. In relation to the latter, we have already launched 10 sustainable initiatives for the district including green energy, sustainable waste management, support for cycling, parklets and replanting, sustainable tourism (Golden Mile), and an annual RE[act] Festival for a sustainable Belfast.
- We support the repurposing of Brunswick Street and Blackstaff Square into a vibrant hospitality and night-time economy destination. The pop-up interventions that will be delivered by the LQ BID / City Council partnership in 2022 will be a positive step forward, but further short-term investment is required, plus a significant capital investment under Streets Ahead V.
- The transformation of Franklin Street and Amelia Street into a walking / cycling route would encourage sustainable modes of transport between the Transport Hub and the City Centre (plus wider destinations via cycle links along Ormeau Avenue to Gasworks Bridge and Dublin Road to Queen's University).
- We would propose the relocation of the main pedestrian / cycling crossing in Great Victoria Street in line with Amelia Street to support this link.

## Reimagine the Inner Ring Road and End Car Dominance

LQ BID supports this aspiration as it complements our long-term vision to promote sustainable and active transport within the Linen Quarter.

In relation to the Bankmore Link section of the inner ring road, our 2019 Regeneration Vision suggested the removal of surface car parks on Ormeau Avenue (lands originally reserved for the southern section of the Inner Ring Road) and repurposing these into new office/residential developments. These would be supported with a linear play park on Bankmore Road and a cycling greenway on Ormeau Avenue.



Replacing the Inner Ring Road at this section with a cycling greenway will link the major residential area of East Belfast (via the Gasworks Bridge) with the major employment, transport and academic centres at the Linen Quarter, Transport Hub and Queen's University. The greenway will also operate in the opposite direction to provide a green lung into Ormeau Park for the residential and business community.

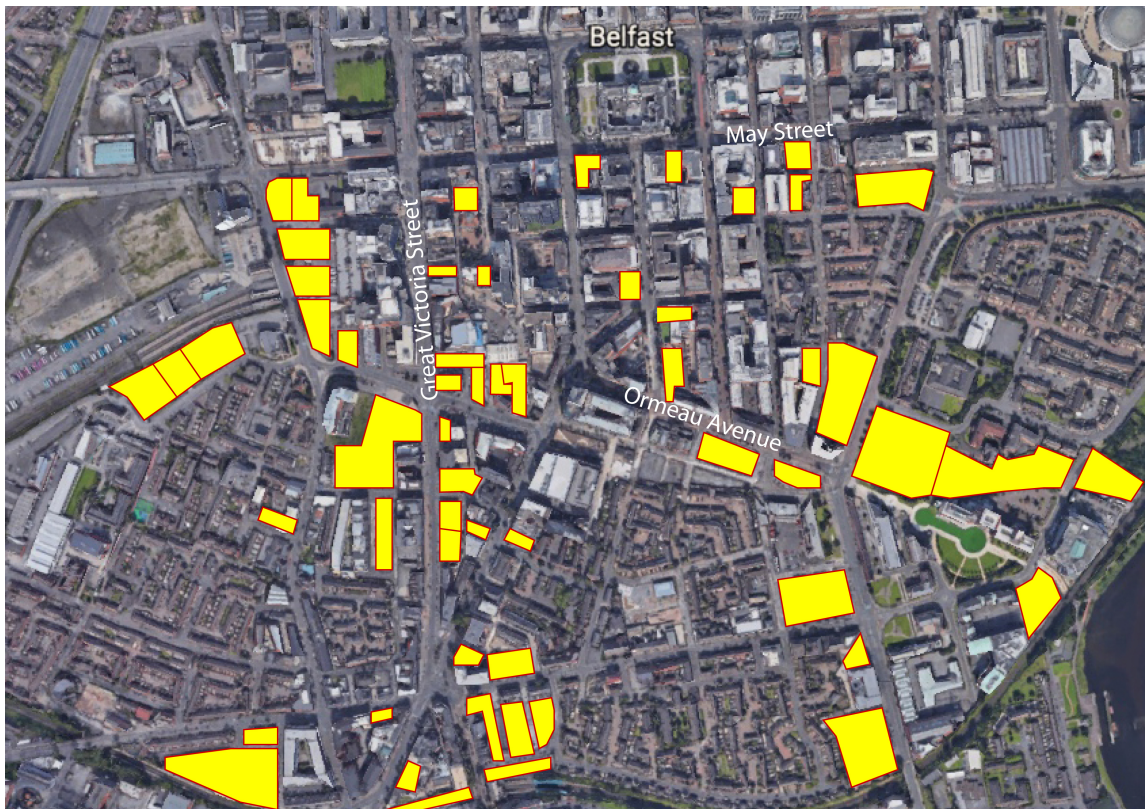
### Proposed Interventions

- LQ BID is generally supportive. However, we think the proposed one-way gyratory system for Durham Street and Great Victoria Street would not work well in practice. Instead, the BID envisages the reimagining of Great Victoria Street as a two-lane road serving both directions across its full length. Such a road design would allow two-way traffic of public transport services, including the Glider, while also facilitating car traffic destined for the city centre. Re-orientating traffic in this way will support aspirations to remodel Bedford Street, Dublin Road and Shaftesbury Square as part of the Civic Spine and will facilitate smoother traffic flow (particularly across shatter zones like Shaftesbury Square).
- LQ BID is in favour of enhancing pedestrian and cycle links over the motorway to improve access between West Belfast and the city centre.
- We are keen to assist the implementation of the 2021 Belfast Cycling Strategy and the One Million Tree Programme.



### Promote City Centre Living

LQ BID are supportive of this key move as it underpins the BID's long-term vision to transform the Linen Quarter into a sustainable district with an improved balance between residential and offices. The Linen Quarter could be remodelled to function as a 15-min neighbourhood, although neighbourhood facilities such as GPs, convenience stores and schools will need to be included as part of these plans. Residential developments in the neighbourhood would ideally consist of 6-8 storey 'mansion blocks' which will support a critical mass of residents and include mixed tenure, shared facilities, and a communal resident's garden. LQ BID feel that there are ample opportunities within the Linen Quarter to insert this model of residential building (see image below).



The aspiration to build more residential within the city centre should be underpinned by higher space standards that would rebalance the current focus on built-to-rent schemes, featuring mostly studios and 1-bedroom apartments, towards housing suitable for family units. LQ BID advocate higher sustainable building standards and have produced a report on Green Building design as a first step towards achieving such standards. The BID also believe that the Council and government departments should lead by example by attaching ambitious sustainable building standards as condition for releasing land in their ownership to private developers (e.g., Charlotte Street / Aspley Street car parks).

When it comes to the proposed interventions the BID is generally supportive:

- We support the inclusion of a linear park in Bruce Street and would be keen to assist with implementation / delivery.
- LQ BID strongly support the development of a network of green streets (particularly Dublin Road / Bruce Street / Linenhall Street / Ormeau Avenue) with cycle highways located in Franklin Street and Bankmore Link. Such green streets should include large scale Sustainable Urban Drainage solutions to decrease pressure on the currently overused sewage system and to mitigate flood risk.
- The BID support the creation of new vibrant spaces, particularly in front of Broadcasting House enveloping the Thomas Thompson Fountain, a new linear play park at Bankmore Street, and a pedestrian zone with pocket park / civic space / outdoor cafe at Shaftesbury Square.





## **Embrace the River Lagan and Waterfront**

LQ BID support the objectives and proposed interventions associated with this key move. The Cycle Bridge from Gasworks to Ormeau Avenue has been agreed as part of the City Deal, and already has a design with planning permission. We would like to see this bridge included as a short-term intervention / catalyst opportunity.

## **Final Comments**

The Bolder Vision provides a very positive vision for Belfast and LQ BID welcome the carefully considered proposals that have been developed by the three public sector partners.

Town and city centres are currently facing an existential threat, as working and leisure practices undergo radical change. The Bolder Vision provides an appropriate strategic response to these challenges, which are critical for the future resilience and vitality of our city. In addition, the Vision helps to address historic problems such as connectivity, green & social space, and lack of residential.

LQ BID strongly support the aspirations of the Bolder Vision. To help Belfast emerge from the pandemic, and to address the accelerated social and economic changes that the pandemic has brought, we would encourage public sector partnership to maintain progress and move at speed to develop a costed delivery plan and secure the required budget allocation.