Re: Belfast Inner North West Masterplan SEA Scoping Consultation

Dear Callie,

Thank-you for your email dated 12th April 2018 regarding the SEA scoping of the Inner North West Masterplan. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland (DAERA) Northern Ireland Environment Agency has considered the consultation documents and our opinions are set out below.

General SEA Comments

For information, a couple of useful information sources that highlight the current state of the environment in Northern Ireland at a regional level are:


Landscape Character and Seascape Character can be found at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland

UK National Ecosystems Assessment Chapter 18 Northern Ireland http://uknea.unepwcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=m%2BvhAV3c9uk%3D&tabid=82,
Biodiversity, flora and fauna

The North West Area is hydrologically connected to a number of European Designated Sites and will therefore require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to be carried alongside the SEA.

In section 5.0 of the scoping report the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, and the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 should be added to the list.

In section 6.0 DAERA welcomes the acknowledgement of Brownfield land as a potential priority habitat within the Biodiversity, flora and fauna section.

Criteria used to identify valuable Open Mosaic habitats can be found at: https://www.buglife.org.uk/sites/default/files/Identifying%20open%20mosaic%20habitat.pdf

In section 6.0 under wastewater capacity we note that investment in wastewater infrastructure has been highlighted as an issue. Belfast City council should contact NI Water for information on current and future Waste Water Treatment Works capacity in Belfast.

DAERA have a map browser for NI protected sites and known priority habitats see: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/natural-environment-map-viewer

NIEA Natural Heritage Digital datasets https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/download-digital-datasets

Marine

Section 3 - Contents on SEA under Natural Environment – The Council has recognised that seals are evident in Belfast Lough and because they are mobile species SAC’s further afield outside the council boundary from which seals are site selection features have to be considered.

We welcome the inclusion of North Channel cSAC, The Maidens SAC and East Coast Marine pSPA European designated sites in the assessment process.

We note in Section 6 Environmental Issues/Problems. The Coast, Marine and River areas are vulnerable to pollution so the council has recognised this and one of the environmental objectives is to improve the ecological status of the waterways.

DAERA Marine Plan Team would advise that when taking any decision which relates to any function capable of affecting (or which might affect) the marine area, which is not an authorisation or enforcement decision, Section 58 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) and Section 8 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, require a public authority to have regard to the appropriate marine policy documents.
For Belfast City Council, this means that currently, in the preparation of the Inner North West Masterplan and all of its associated documents, you, as the Public Authority, are legislatively required to have regard to the UK Marine Policy Statement (UK MPS).

Once it is published in final form, you will also have to have regard to the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (in addition to the UK MPS). Careful attention must be paid to both the UK MPS and the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland, as these marine policy documents are of equivalent standing with terrestrial planning documents, such as, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

DAERA Marine Plan Team note that, in line with the advice given above, any potential impact on the Northern Ireland Marine Area will be considered through the inclusion in the Scoping Report of the relevant marine related legislation and policy documents.

Specifically, we would also note that;

At 2.0, Relationship with other plans and environmental protection objectives (Schedule 2 (1)), you list the relevant legislation of MCAA and the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the marine policy document, UK MPS (note that UK MPS was published in 2011, not 2013).

You may also wish to include the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland, which has been published in draft form for public consultation, however, while it is a material consideration for decision makers, it will not carry any weight in decision making, until it is published in final form and adopted.

At 6.0, Environmental Issues/Problems (Schedule 2 (4)), it would be useful to include consideration of Seascape as part of your landscape considerations.

Climate

Ref -Page 3 of the attached report: after the text “UK CCRA 2017 report.” insert the following text …“(Northern Ireland’s national summary)”

Air Quality

We welcome that air and noise have been scoped in. Levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) are indeed a problem in some parts of the Greater Belfast area. Belfast City Council’s latest Review and Assessment of Air Quality report can give further detail. There is also an issue with breach of nitrogen dioxide annual mean limit value as set out in Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC.
Please contact the SEA Team at SEAteam@daera-ni.gov.uk should you have any queries or require clarification.

Yours sincerely,

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