This document constitutes Belfast City Council’s Scoping Report for the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the draft Inner North West Masterplan, published in December 2017. It is submitted in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programme (NI) Regulations 2004.

The Inner North West Masterplan aspires to transform this part of the City Centre (Figure 1) through the creation of better connected, mixed use neighbourhoods.

**Figure 1:** Location of Inner North West area

It seeks to do this by having regard to a number of overarching Masterplan objectives and to design guidance for identified Character Areas. The Inner North West Masterplan (INW Masterplan) provides design guidance for 10 Character Areas and Streets. In the main, this advice relates to the scale and massing of buildings and the nature of the public spaces in between.
Viewed in the context of the above this Scoping Report explains the remit of the SEA by describing the approach to its preparation in Section 2.0 and by outlining its envisaged contents in Section 3.0.

**2.0 APPROACH TO SEA**

The approach to the preparation of the SEA involves the following steps:

**Step 1:** Identify the environmental issues/problems in the area. This will be assisted by the examination of environmental information and correspondence for recent planning permissions for major development in the area. This work will help highlight the salient environmental issues relating to the Inner North West, as well as the type of mitigation and environmental monitoring that may be involved.

**Step 2:** Review SEA objectives in the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) and environmental protection objectives at the local level for their relevance to the INW Masterplan. Incorporate where appropriate and establish more if required.

**Step 3:** Test the **8 Masterplan objectives** against the aforementioned SEA objectives for the protection of the environment. The objectives for the Inner North West area are outlined below:

1. To reuse and integrate the existing heritage
2. To deliver a variety of residential accommodation or tenures
3. To provide high quality and distinctive work and employment spaces
4. To support city centre retail activity
5. To improve and support the existing offer and create links to new and existing creative and cultural activity
6. To provide a high quality public realm to create green, walkable and cyclable spaces
7. To promote sustainable communities, quality urban design and help create a welcoming and attractive place for everyone
8. To upgrade and manage the transport and parking facilities and promote active and sustainable transport

Taking into account the above it is necessary to consider alternatives to these Masterplan objectives and to outline mitigation and monitoring where required.

**Step 4:** Test the **key urban design principles** that underpin the Illustrative Masterplan for the area against the SEA objectives. These principles include design advice for streets, buildings and 10 Character Areas.

Mindful of the above approach and having regard to the 2004 Regulations and best practice guidance, including the 2005 Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, the SEA is expected to consist of the following contents overleaf.
3.0 CONTENTS OF SEA

The main components of the SEA are outlined under the subject headings below, with reference made in parentheses to the relevant parts of the 2004 Regulations.

1.0 Main objectives of Inner North West Masterplan (Schedule 2, (1))

The Inner North West Masterplan (INW Masterplan) essentially outlines development objectives and design guidance that underpin the planned regeneration of the area. In so doing, it is aimed at fostering a coordinated approach among stakeholders so that projects can take place against a holistic vision for the area.

2.0 Relationship with other plans and environmental protection objectives (Schedule 2 (1))

The INW Masterplan has evolved from the Council’s City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy 2015 (CCRIS). By highlighting how development of individual sites can take place within the context of a wider vision for the area, the Masterplan aims to have material weight in guiding the general layout and density of development in this area.

Documentation relevant to this SEA includes:

- Belfast Local Development Plan 2035 (currently at Preferred Options stage)
- Regional Development Strategy 2035
- Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (draft BMAP) 2015
- Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) 2015
- Biodiversity Strategy for NI 2020
- Sustainable Development Strategy NI 2010
- NI Waste Management Strategy 2013
- Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021
- A New Approach to Regional Transportation 2012
- UK CCRA 2017 report and NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2014
- Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (NI) 2011
- Living with Water Programme: Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan 2015
- UK Marine Policy Statement 2013 (UK MPS)
- Marine Plan for NI (once published)
- Belfast Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2007
- Belfast City Council Air Quality Review and Assessment Reports
- Belfast City Centre Access & Mobility Study 2008 by DSD & DRD
- North Eastern River Basin Management Plan 2015
- Conservation Objectives for Belfast Inner and Outer Lough SPAs 2015 by NIEA
- Belfast Lough Local Management Area Action Plan
- Belfast Urban Regeneration Potential Study Update 2012 by DSD
- Queen’s Quay Masterplan 2013 by DSD
- Belfast Integrated Tourism Strategy 2015-2020
- Belfast Integrated Economic Strategy 2015-2020
- Belfast City Council Air Quality Action Plan 2015-2020
• Belfast Strategic Noise Maps

In addition to the above, environmental protection objectives relevant to the preparation of this SEA are considered in part 5.0 below.

3.0 Environmental need for Masterplan and evolution without it (Schedule 2 (2))

In the absence of the INW Masterplan there will be uncoordinated, piecemeal development on individual sites. The Masterplan will help ensure that individual proposals can be assessed against a broader framework for the area, particularly in respect of improving connectivity and travel by foot, bike and public transport.

The Masterplan’s desire to provide City Centre living opportunities can also be considered environmentally preferable and sustainable to the alternative of developing housing on the periphery of Belfast and in greenfield locations.

4.0 Existing baseline environment of the Inner North West area (Schedule 2 (3))

The main elements of the natural and historic environment in this area are listed below.

Natural environment
Belfast Lough is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA), due to the birdlife attracted to it, but there are no Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in the Council area. Having stated the latter, seals are evident in Belfast Lough and, because they are mobile species, SACs further afield from which seals originate will have to be considered. The European sites and other designations that have to be examined include:

• Belfast Lough Special Protection Area (SPA)
• Belfast Lough Open Water SPA
• North Channel candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC)
• The Maidens SAC
• East Coast Marine proposed SPA (pSPA)
• Belfast Lough RAMSAR site
• Inner Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)
• Outer Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)

The locations of the nearest designations in relation to the INW Masterplan are shown on Map 1 appended to the end of this report.

Historic environment
The main features of Belfast's historic environment relevant to this area are:

• An Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) that applies to the whole Masterplan area
• Historic buildings
• features of Industrial heritage

The locations of the historic buildings and industrial heritage are shown in Figure 2.
5.0 Environmental Protection Objectives relevant to Strategy (Schedule 2 (5))

Environmental Protection Objectives relevant to the INW Masterplan include the up-to-date Strategic Environmental Assessment objectives identified in the Preferred Options Paper of the LDP, as well as specific conservation objectives for the Belfast SPAs and other environmental designations listed.

Environmental Protection Objectives are mainly found in European Directives and most have been transposed into UK law as Regulations. The relevant directives and related legislation are listed below.
- SEA Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.
- The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004
- The Birds Directive 2009/147/EC
- Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) - known as the Habitats Regulations
- Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended)
- The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended).
- Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
- Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995
- Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA)
- Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013
- The Environmental Noise Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise
- The Landfill Directive 99/3/EC on landfills of waste
- The Drinking Water Directive 98/83/EC on the quality of water intended for human consumption
- Air Quality Fourth Daughter Directive 2004/107/EC
- Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe
- The Industrial Emissions Directive 2010/75/EU on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control
- Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC. Established an overall policy for the production and promotion of energy from renewable sources in the EU
- The EU Floods Directive 2007/60/EC on the assessment and management of flood risks
- Aarhus Convention (1998) which established a number of rights of the public with regard to the environment.
- The European Convention on the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention)
- The European Landscape Convention (this applies to the historic as well as the natural environment)
- The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta, 1992)
- Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
6.0 Environmental Issues/Problems (Schedule 2 (4))

The main environmental issues generated by the mixed use vision for this City Centre location are interrelated and apply in varying degrees during the construction and operational stage. They are briefly listed below:

- Coast, marine and river – safeguarding against any deterioration in water quality at the Lagan Estuary and Belfast Harbour from Masterplan proposals that are aimed at accommodating increased residents and employees in this area. Environmental objectives seek to improve the ecological status potential of the waterways, with the principal aim of protecting environmental designations of International, European and National importance. Because the Masterplan area has a hydrological link to the River Lagan these designations must be assessed for environmental impact (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.0: Hydrological link to River Lagan**

- Air and Environmental Quality (including noise) – this relates to the need to reduce reliance on private transport in order to lower NO2 emissions.

  Added to the above, the SEA will have to highlight that noise and disturbance at the construction and operational stage does not adversely affect marine life and bird populations in the SPAs.

  Furthermore, the SEA will have to take into account noise impact on existing and proposed residents when evaluating development initiatives under the Masterplan.

- Wastewater capacity – investment in infrastructure may be required to facilitate the extent of growth envisaged in the Inner North West Masterplan. The use of SUDs in the stormwater drainage systems of future development should also be encouraged to manage discharge, particularly during extreme weather events.
• Contaminated soils – former uses in the area may generate concerns for ground contamination and pollutant linkages.

• Biodiversity, flora and fauna – ensuring their protection and promotion in a mainly urban environment that is earmarked for intense growth. Environmental assessments prepared for major planning applications should assist in identifying the extent of wildlife in the area. Brownfield land has the capacity to support diverse and rare communities of species and it has been added to the list of Northern Ireland Priority Habitats as ‘Open Mosaic Habitats in Previously Developed Land’. Not all Brownfield sites support Open Mosaic Habitats and reference has to be made to the relevant criteria for identification.

• Waste Management – encouraging reduction and recycling to meet landfill obligations.

• Historic environment (Cultural and built heritage) – protecting historic buildings and their settings. This also involves taking into account the Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) and the potential to respect the industrial and business heritage of the area.

• Landscape – safeguarding against unsympathetic development in this part of Belfast City Centre that might adversely affect its townscape or wider urban setting.

• Material Assets, Population and Human Health (open space and access) - Examining the capacity to increase open space provision and public rights of way is another environmental consideration for this SEA given the relative under-provision of open space in the City Centre as a whole.

• Flood risk – identifying the risk of flooding in the area and detailing management and mitigation where required.

According to the Rivers Agency’s flood maps the area is not considered to be susceptible to flooding from a river or from the sea but, like a lot of areas, it is susceptible to surface water accumulation (Figure 4.0).
Climatic factors – examining the scope of the Masterplan to reduce vehicle emissions (e.g. reducing car parking availability) and to incorporate low carbon initiatives in the design and operations of new buildings (e.g. use of renewable energy, travel plans, etc.).

7.0 Assessment of the likely significant effects (Schedule 2 (6) (7) (8) (9))

In assessing the likely significant effects on the environment it is considered appropriate, at the outset, to identify those developments that have planning permission and are likely to be implemented. This is necessary because mitigation for these proposals has already been determined and alternatives are not possible.

Having stated this, it will be necessary to consider their cumulative implications in conjunction with other proposals. For example, this will involve the estimation of the total number of residents, workers and vehicles likely to be attracted to the area over time.

Assessment of the likely significant effects will involve the following:

- Estimate impact of Masterplan as outlined in the Approach to SEA earlier (Section 2.0). The illustrative Masterplan will be assessed on the basis of its impact relationship with the SEA
objectives for the area and its effects on the environment will be classified according to the following categories.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likely significant adverse effect</th>
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<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Likely significant beneficial effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>Likely insignificant effect or not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Uncertain due to lack of detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Not assessed - proposals already have planning permission or effects are assessed under other Plans/Strategies</td>
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</table>

- Consider alternatives to strategic recommendations in the INW Masterplan. In light of this testing consideration may be given to the requirement for alternative or additional wording for the Masterplan objectives and design principles in order to reinforce the need for environmental protection and sustainable development.

- Outline mitigation, where warranted, by way of prevention, reduction or compensatory measures to offset significant adverse effects. Guidance on appropriate mitigation measures will be assisted by examination of recent planning permissions in the area.

- Identify measures for monitoring effects on environment.

8.0 Preparation of Non-Technical Summary (Schedule 2 (10))

This will summarise the key findings of the SEA Environmental Report.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Inner North West Masterplan outlines development objectives and design principles for a part of the City Centre that is much in need of regeneration. While the document is entitled “Masterplan” it is essentially a guidance document rather than a blueprint for the redevelopment of the area. The vision that is outlined in the document is tabled for illustrative purposes only and is principally intended to highlight the scale and pattern of development that may be possible in the area.

Within the context of the above the Council would particularly welcome the views of the NIEA on the suggested scope of this SEA.

Callie Persic  
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11th April 2018
MAP 1: Location of Inner North West area relative to Natural Heritage designations

Natural Heritage Designations
- Belfast Lough Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA/Proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA
- Area of Special Scientific Interest:
  1. Inner Belfast Lough (Part of)
  2. Craigantlet Woods (Part of)
  3. Belvoir
  4. Bellevue
- Hazelwood Area of Scientific Interest
- Local Nature Reserve:
  A. Ballyaghagan
  B. Bog Meadows
  C. Hazelwood
  D. Lagan Meadows

Legend:
- Council Area
- Metropolitan/Settlement Development Limit
- Belfast City Centre
- Belfast Harbour Area

Not to scale
For illustrative purposes only