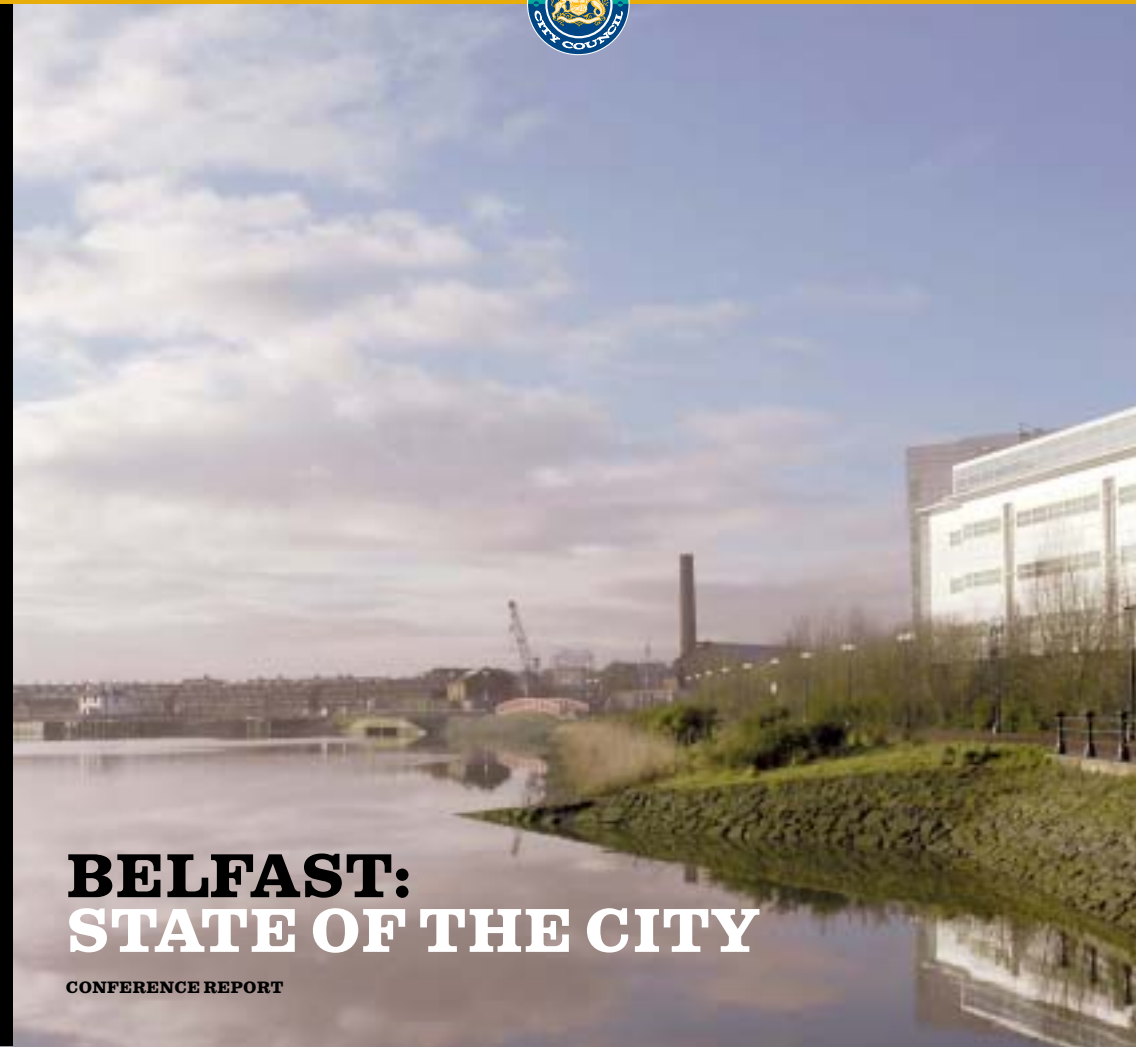




## Contact us

Patricia Elliott  
**BELFAST: STATE OF THE CITY**

Development Department  
The Cecil Ward Building  
4-10 Linenhall Street  
Belfast BT2 8BP  
Tel: (028) 9027 0391  
Fax: (028) 9027 0501  
development@belfastcity.gov.uk  
www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity



# BELFAST: STATE OF THE CITY

CONFERENCE REPORT



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE



**Design**  
www.whitenoisestudios.com

**Principal Photography**  
www.g-ridimage.com

**Cover photograph**  
The River Lagan at the Gasworks

## Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Why hold the conference?</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>The research</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Belfast: A competitive city?</b>	<b>06</b>
Critical features of urban competitiveness	06
How does Belfast compare?	07
What inhibits Belfast's performance?	07
Actions for change - the centre city?	08
<b>Belfast: A Masterplan</b>	<b>09</b>
How will this work out in practice?	10
What about a way forward?	10
<b>Turning Belfast Around - the State of Governance</b>	<b>11</b>
A delivery mechanism	11
A strategic approach	12
Issues of formal structures	12
Tyler's analysis of the situation in Belfast:	13
The message for Belfast	13
<b>Summary of the evidence</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The conference day</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Setting the scene</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>The conference working groups</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>The To Do list</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Neighbourhood</b>	<b>17</b>
Physical	17
Economy	18
All groups	18
<b>The plenary session</b>	<b>19</b>
Neighbourhood sub-group	19
Physical sub-group	19
Economy sub-group	19
<b>Sheffield: A lesson learned?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>A way forward</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Information resources</b>	<b>22</b>
Website	22
Publications	22
<b>Delegate organisations</b>	<b>22</b>

# BELFAST: STATE OF THE CITY

CONFERENCE REPORT



## Foreword

At the recent launch of a report\* from Sheffield University, Professor Daniel Dorling concluded that the UK was being "split in half".

Speaking about his research, which is a comprehensive analysis of the most recent census data, Professor Dorling noted: "To the south is the metropolis of Greater London, to the north and west is the 'archipelago of the provinces' - city islands that appear to be slowly sinking demographically, socially and economically".

Belfast, as a city on the extreme edge of this archipelago, finds itself in a fast-moving, globalising economy competing with, not only cities in the UK, but places right across the world.

Unfortunately, while Belfast has made advances over the past decade, it is clear that our city is becoming a less competitive member of this archipelago. We are failing because we are ill-equipped to deal with the economic and social challenges of the 1990s, nevermind those of the twenty-first century.

Belfast City Council, as the civic leader, has been increasingly concerned about this deteriorating situation and there is a growing realisation within the Council that the current status quo is not acceptable. As part of a process of engagement with those who we believe hold the key to our city's future successes, the Council's Development Committee hosted a major conference in April 2004 called Belfast: State of the City. We brought together organisations and asked them to consider the challenges we face and how we can work collectively to produce a shared development path for the future of Belfast.

I am glad to say that amongst the 150 conference delegates who represented government bodies and organisations from the public, private and community/voluntary sectors, there was overwhelming agreement that something has to be done and done soon.

The enthusiasm of delegates was supplemented by their determination to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to build on the considerable momentum that was generated at the event. A 'To Do' list was established during the conference - a series of practical actions which the city's stakeholder organisations need to carry out over the next few years to best utilise Belfast's many assets and ensure that the city has a sustainable and competitive future.

The Council is keen to champion this 'To Do' list. We believe it forms a set of core actions which are essential for the city's success. The list also illustrates the potential that can be tapped into - given the necessary commitment and delivery mechanisms.

I believe the success of Belfast: State of the City was built upon the sterling research presented to delegates by a number of eminent experts in the field of urban regeneration. They presented us with the facts of our current position and illustrated in a brilliant fashion our options for change. There were few in the audience who failed to recognise the Belfast that they described and there was strong agreement in support of their conclusions.

A common theme during the event was the need for organisations to work together more closely and to build bonds of trust. We in the Council believe that Belfast: State of the City will encourage this to happen.

Belfast: State of the City is an on-going process. The Council is eager to carry on the advances made on the day of the conference and is particularly concerned that the support for the To Do list is turned into deeds. This report presents an overview of the background research for the conference and the discussions that took place leading to the creation of the To Do list. It is also a call to those who can make a difference in our city to step up to the plate. The time for action is here. ■

**Councillor Ian Crozier**  
Chair of Development Committee  
August 2004

\* *People and Places; A 2001 Census Atlas of the UK*, Daniel Dorling and Bethan Thomas, Policy Press 2004



## Background

### Why hold the conference?

**“Cities can help themselves. Don't sit around waiting for someone else to do it. The really smart places get their act together.”**

**Michael Parkinson**



Belfast: State of the City is a response to the historic crossroads at which Belfast currently finds itself. Large scale European funding is coming to an end; the government is negotiating the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) - a document that will dictate the physical shape of the city for the next twenty-five years; there is an on-going review of public administration in Northern Ireland - something which may well revamp the current 1970s/80s legacy; and the huge period of global economic growth in the mid-1990s has slowed.

What has gone before is no longer an indicator of what is to come. This period of flux presents us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-examine the city's needs and to redirect the combined effort required to meet them.

Through its engagement with the government's BMAP consultations, and the development of its own agenda for the economic and social regeneration of the city, Belfast City Council has come to the conclusion that what is needed at this point in the city's history is a serious re-examination, by all participants, of the development path that the city is taking.

It is apparent to many that over recent years the mechanisms and structures that were put in place to deal with economic decline and the serious social and political problems that Belfast experienced over the last three decades, are no longer relevant to the demands of the twenty-first century. It is not unreasonable to ask if many of the city's structures still represent the best solution to today's problems.



It has been exciting to see just how well Belfast has recovered from past adversity. Visitors returning home for the first time since the mid-1990s are often amazed at Belfast's transformation. The physical signs of inward investment are obvious and the city's skyline appears to change on a weekly basis - new offices, apartments, cafes, restaurants, the Waterfront Hall and of course the riverside regeneration running through the heart of the city.

The city centre, once a tired no-man's land, shows signs once again of becoming the vibrant heart of Northern Ireland. Belfast, as the economic engine of Northern Ireland, has re-established itself as the powerhouse for economic growth right across the region.

Superficially, it would be easy to believe that a successful future for Belfast is guaranteed - but unfortunately there are warning signs that indicate this is not the case. Belfast has a number of serious underlying problems which are currently either not being recognised or are not being tackled in an appropriate or effective manner. The conference will, we hope, be seen as a significant step towards dealing with these problems and helping to make Belfast's transformation a permanent success story. ■

**Marie-Thérèse McGivern**  
**Director of Development**  
 August 2004



## The research

**'UK Cities left behind by rivals in Europe'**  
**Financial Times headline, January 2004**



**"The right way forward in this city is a no-brainer" Professor Michael Parkinson**

In an effort to offer both an independent and a current perspective on the state of Belfast, the Council invited a number of leading experts to examine the city in terms of its competitiveness and 'fitness' for meeting the challenges of the new century.

This research formed a baseline for conference deliberations and shaped the discussions that followed - in particular the formation of the To Do list. The Council has increasingly stressed the importance of research-based policy formation as a way of breaking down pre-conceived and fossilised approaches to problem-solving. The experience of the conference suggests that it is a fertile direction in which to proceed.

The following offers a brief overview of the research that was discussed. These were weighty pieces of work and the full research papers, as listed at the end of this document, should be referred to for more details.

### 1. Belfast: A competitive city?

Professor Michael Parkinson of Liverpool John Moores University, a renowned expert in city competitiveness, examined how Belfast compares with other UK and European regional cities. Professor Parkinson has already carried out similar work for the Core Cities project in England and is an advisor to central Government.

Michael Parkinson's research highlights both the strengths and weaknesses in Belfast's ability to compete in European and world markets. It should be seen in the context of wider work that he has undertaken for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of the eight English Core Cities, the Regional Development Agencies, the Treasury and the DTI. This work is a systematic effort to understand the roots of the economic success of European cities, to see how well English cities are doing and what they should do to perform better.

Such 'urban competitiveness' is defined as the ability of an urban economy to attract and maintain firms with stable or rising market shares in an activity, while maintaining stable or increasing standards of living for those who participate in it. The competitiveness of cities is not just about the income of firms but also how that income benefits residents.

### Critical features of urban competitiveness

Parkinson identifies six critical features of urban competitiveness:

#### 1. Economic Diversity

Successful cities that respond well to economic change are those which are least dependent on a single sector.

#### 2. Skilled workforce

Such a workforce is a critical feature as modern urban economies increasingly depend upon knowledge intensive sectors, even within manufacturing.

#### 3. Connectivity

The most successful cities have the physical and electronic infrastructure to move goods, services and people quickly and efficiently - be they internal or external, physical, electronic or cultural.

#### 4. Strategic decision making capacity

Processes and politics have a strong influence on competitiveness. Networks and relationships between key players in the public and private sectors are crucial.

#### 5. Innovation in organisations

Three features of innovation lead to regional and urban competitiveness: investment in modern, knowledge-based physical equipment; investment in research and education; and investment in innovation and labour productivity.

#### 6. Quality of life

'Soft location' factors are becoming an increasingly important part of economic decision-making and they are significant in attracting and retaining skilled workers to their cities.



### How does Belfast compare?

Parkinson's research shows that the city lags in terms of innovation, quality of the workforce and connections to the European mainland. However, in some respects Belfast performs rather better in relation to large English cities than might be expected:

- it is not the worst performer in terms of wealth measured by GDP per capita and,
- although it has large numbers of under-qualified people, it has a surprisingly large number of skilled people.
- Direct connections with Europe and the rest of the world are not good but the city does have good connections with the UK mainland in comparison with many of the core cities.
- Relatively low cost of living and housing and a good supply of suburban housing
- It has experienced a substantial renaissance in the centre city during the past five years.

Parkinson believes that the city lacks one critical feature of a competitive city - **the strategic capacity to deliver long term economic and social programmes.** At present politics, governing and governance are preventing Belfast from punching at its proper weight.

- Belfast is a small city that needs to attract more people where it can and capitalise upon the large population of the wider metropolitan area.
- It needs to reduce unemployment and improve the educational performance of schools so that the qualifications of its work force are improved.
- It needs to increase its connectivity with the wider European scene.
- It needs to increase its innovation levels, which are very low. This requires greater linkages between the private sector, the universities and the public sector to encourage the commercialisation of intellectual knowledge and the encouraging a greater entrepreneurial culture
- It needs to improve the quality of life to attract a skilled workforce.
- Most importantly it needs to build upon its strategic capacity to mobilise resources and implement long term development strategies.

### What inhibits Belfast's performance?

Parkinson noted at the Belfast: State of the City conference that there are key characteristics of Belfast which are inhibiting its ability to act competitively and which need to be addressed urgently:

#### 1. Strategic decision-making capacity

Parkinson believes that Belfast is an over-governed city and suggests that:

- There are substantial divisions between local and national government.
- There is a substantial division between the main parts of the region.
- There are substantial divisions between Belfast and the rest of the metropolitan area.
- There are substantial divisions within the city itself.

#### 2. The Centre City

The 'centre city', as defined by the Belfast Masterplan, is a challenge and an opportunity. During the Troubles much of it fell behind the standards expected of a city of its size and although it has been revitalising it is still not good enough in terms of the quality of the public realm, maintenance, physical architecture and level of mobility.

#### 3. Lack of Trust

There is a clear lack of trust between different constituencies in Belfast which make it difficult to make progress and build upon the development which has occurred. It would be helpful if there was an issue on which partnership could actually be demonstrated rather than simply expressed. The centre city might be such an issue.

#### 4. Departmental fragmentation

It is suggested that central government is fragmented into silos in which the existence of eleven departments encourage confusion and duplication rather than cooperation.



#### 5. Planning is too slow

There is a view (put forcibly by the private and public sector) that the planning process is too slow. The level of development taking place in recent years has proved a major challenge for the planning service.

#### 6. Civil servants and local officials

He suggests that there is a view in local government (strenuously denied by senior civil servants) that they are not valued or seen as competent by civil servants. A reciprocal feeling was expressed to him by some that civil servants have no experience of directly delivering policies and programmes on the ground.

#### 7. Turf, territory and conflicts

There are a series of tensions around 'turf and territory' which make it very difficult to build Belfast and to increase its competitiveness. Part of the difficulty is that there is little consensus about how much Belfast matters to the metropolitan area and to Northern Ireland. As a result efforts to focus and concentrate upon Belfast are defeated by demands that other places should get comparable treatment.

#### 8. Partnership fatigue

Apart from territorial fragmentation, another consequence is that each community has developed its own governance arrangements. In particular, different parts of the city have a series of overlapping partnerships.

#### 9. Strategy fatigue

One of the consequences of fragmented communities, institutions and policy-making is that there has been an uncontrolled growth in the number of strategic plans for the city. There is little overlap or coherence between them, with many different agencies working for different purposes on different time scales.

#### 10. Public/private culture

Belfast rates very low on its innovation levels and at least part of this must be explained by the size and impact of the public sector.

#### 11. Limited local government

The local authority does not have sufficient powers and responsibilities to act as the champion for regeneration, as its counterparts in England are doing. Local authorities in the big cities have been changing their roles in recent years acting as strategic mobilisers and encouraging partnerships between key players.

#### 12. Frozen attitudes

**- frozen institutions**  
Parkinson suggests the city's frozen institutions and attitudes are not helpful to a city trying to sharpen its act and join the competition in the European big league.

### Actions for change - the centre city?

Based on his examination of the current situation in the city Parkinson makes a series of proposals to drive the city forward based on a centre city focussed delivery vehicle.

An opportunity lies around the economic development of the centre city around which there is currently no clear focus. A debate about the future of the centre city and any potential delivery vehicle could warm frozen attitudes and institutions.

Despite concerns that such a vehicle may add yet another layer of bureaucracy within the city, Parkinson notes that there is considerable willingness to explore it amongst development partners in the city.



**“What we can say is that Belfast is not actually short of money. Belfast has, per head of the population, probably three and possibly four times more [development] money being ploughed into the city than places such as Leeds or Sheffield or Manchester or Nottingham or Newcastle. That's a hell of a lot of money. And what are we getting from it?”**

**Kevin McGovern**



**2. Belfast: A Masterplan**

The masterplan was commissioned by Belfast City Council from Colin Buchanan & Partners and provides an economic and physical plan for the development of the city. Kevin McGovern was the Project Director for the masterplan.

The masterplan presents a framework for the revival of the city up to 2020 and is based on an analysis of the city's socio-economic needs, described in terms of the actual physical layout of Belfast. It articulates a way ahead - a strategy for the city that takes account of the economy, land-use transport, environmental, social and public policy issues.

The masterplan was instigated out of the City Council's need to have a coherent response to the BMAP process. It is important that the civic leaders of the city have a response to that process and are able to influence it. The masterplan will become a central reference point for the Council in future consultations and on discussion on singular development issues.

A 'health check' was completed for the plan which highlighted the following issues within the city:

- A steep decline in traditional industry
- A dependency on public sector jobs
- A mismatch between land supply and demand
- A lack of focus on the needs of foreign direct investment and indigenous industry
- A greater need for a strong central core to attract knowledge based industry
- There is serious fracturing between the city's neighbourhoods and the centre
- There is poor physical presentation of Belfast and under-use of environmental assets
- There is confusion over governance in the city, with resources making low impact
- The city is not selling itself effectively to the world.

The masterplan strategy is based around five economic, social and community imperatives aimed at overcoming the issues identified in the health check. These are:

**1. City governance**  
Because of the duplication of function and responsibility, resources tend to be spread thinly. There is a need to unite statutory powers with the political constituency in the city to promote accountability.

**2. Grow the city**  
The city needs to increase the population from 277,000 in 2001 to 400,000 by 2025 (1.8% per annum from 2004 to 2025). The city needs to promote sustainable and compact land-use to encourage higher densities of living and working in the city.

**3. Economy**  
The city needs to develop new industries as Belfast's future prosperity will be based on leading edge companies selling their products competitively on world markets. It also needs to develop existing industry and sectors. This will also offer the opportunity to generate employment for disadvantaged communities and to create new workplaces. It needs to develop the city centre. Not only is this Northern Ireland's prime retail market but also contains key cultural, leisure and tourism facilities. The city centre has a growing residential population and is Northern Ireland's most prestigious office location.

**4. Transport**  
Rather than expanding the road network, the city needs to be both more sustainable and economic by providing access to the city centre using public transport. A growing population will both increase demand and make public transport options more viable.

**5. Neighbourhoods**  
The long-term physical and economic regeneration of neighbourhoods in the centre and middle city is essential. To do this, social inclusion must be robustly promoted if Belfast is to grow and accommodate a diverse population.

**How will this work out in practice?**

The theme of redefining city governance cuts across all elements of the masterplan. Research for the plan found much duplication of functions and responsibilities, which inevitably has led to the inefficient use of resources on the ground. Part of that is due to the lack of a single point of accountability. Belfast City Council needs to be empowered as the civic leader in Belfast to work in partnership with other agencies and departments in the city to establish such accountability.

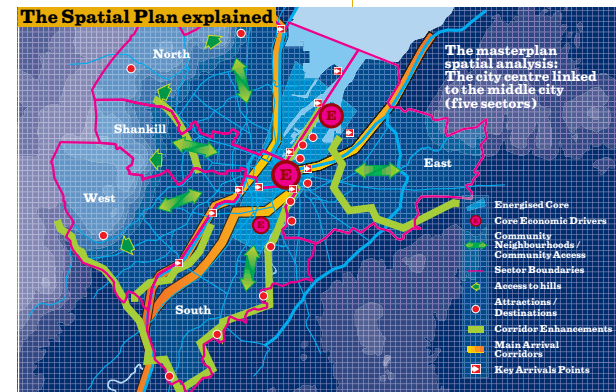
**Belfast needs a new understanding of space in the city and across the region:**

- Support for Belfast as the regional capital
- Support for a 'centre-city' corridor
- Support for a compact city approach that requires:
  - Compact city development
  - Neighbourhood regeneration linking city and neighbourhoods

The five imperatives of the strategy have been translated into five themed objectives for the spatial planning of the city:

1. An energised core - 'centre city'
  2. Connected middle city
  3. Integrated neighbourhood renewal
  4. Released environmental assets
  5. Enhanced city presentation
- (see diagram below)

**The 'centre-city' concept**  
Belfast's 'centre city' zone is the most dynamic economic space in Northern Ireland. It is the region's window on the global economy and should be both recognised and planned for as such. The issue of connectivity and accessibility is critical for the development of the centre city and the realisation of the potential for broader compact city development. The geographical area of the 'centre city' includes not just the traditional city centre but expands outwards to incorporate other relevant zones.



Belfast Mapping Data v3.0. Prepared by I.S.B. based upon the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland map with the permission of © BROWN COPPERFIELD 2005

**What about a way forward?**

Key points of action emerging from the Belfast masterplan:

- A debate is required amongst the city's stakeholders to agree collectively on the right direction forward. The city needs to be building both consensus and capacity - moving ultimately towards a shared single strategy.
- Belfast City Council has to develop its own capacity to deliver and seek to ensure that it is operating in a way that is consistent with the objectives of the masterplan. This includes its economic development policies.
- The city needs to promote urban quality and high standards of design in the city through such initiatives as an Office of the City Architect or an urban design centre.
- A review of regeneration funding is required in relation to how resources are marshalled in the city. The masterplan suggests that a regeneration loan fund be established.
- The city needs to promote a 'quality of life' agenda through service delivery. These are the things that directly impact on standards of peoples lives.
- The city needs to move towards the creation of a single regeneration agency or approach.



"I want to emphasise that change, once it starts moving in the right direction, seems to me to cascade": Peter Tyler, St Catharine's College.

### 3. Turning Belfast Around - the State of Governance

Dr Peter Tyler, Director of Land Economy at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, undertook an examination of a number of regeneration delivery mechanisms that have been implemented in cities in the UK and further afield with a view to making recommendations on a suitable mechanism for Belfast. This research was complemented by an audit carried out by Belfast City Council of extant development strategies and plans affecting the city.

The City Council strategic audit analysed the strategies and plans that influence development in Belfast and the impact that they have on governance in the city. The main points arising from the audit included:

- There is a strategy 'overload' with at least 55 current strategies and plans
- There is no commonly agreed development framework for Belfast

- Many agencies have a regional rather than a Belfast remit
- There is fragmentation between policy setting and its implementation
- There is widespread duplication of effort and dilution of limited resources
- Single functional bodies/agencies are overly dominant
- There is a lack of accountability and transparency
- There are concerns around Government's ability to deliver policy agendas that cross organisational boundaries
- Local authority powers are limited in scope
- There is a lack of local autonomy and community involvement
- There is an absence of strong leadership - there is no 'champion' for the city.

**"Belfast used to launch ships; now it only launches strategies"**  
Anon

The Council's research indicates that the city is at a crucial juncture. A series of underlying structural problems need to be addressed if the city's full potentials are to be unlocked. There is a wealth of talent, expertise and resources in Belfast which, if harnessed



effectively, can ensure that the city develops as a lean, sustainable city capable of competing with the best in Europe and the world. The city's citizens want to live in a first class city and it is the responsibility of development partners to foster an environment in which this can happen.

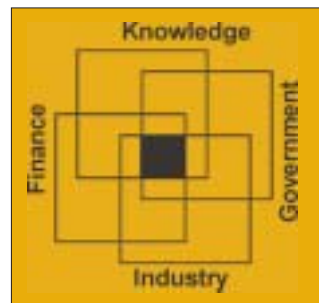
The issue of 'governance' has become an increasingly important one at national, regional and municipal levels. The term refers to the processes and shaping of public policy that influence the creation and delivery of services provided by the formal institutions of government. Good governance is key to both competitiveness and success. Belfast is in a difficult position by not having a lead body with the necessary powers to champion the city at home and abroad.

#### A delivery mechanism

It was against this background that Dr Tyler was asked to examine the issues and the range of delivery mechanisms that have been implemented elsewhere and to offer options for Belfast.

Tyler noted that the breadth of regeneration experience that can be called upon for such an analysis is large. Over the last ten years there have been 1,028 regeneration partnerships in England with a combined expenditure of around £26 billion. However, Tyler's research has indicated that all successful cities have had three recurring characteristics:

1. They have enhanced their core competencies of both **the place and their people** to make it relatively attractive to business;
2. They have **brought together the relevant agents of change** from across all sectors including business, government, the voluntary and



community sectors to work together; and  
3. They have adopted a **strategic approach**.

Success requires that all three of these elements are fully engaged. While, theoretically, these issues may appear simple, the existing institutional maze and resource bases of most cities in reality make it much more difficult to implement. In big cities it is important that the key players from the four main realms are involved:

1. **Knowledge** the people, skills and ideas from education sectors and research institutes in the city
2. **Finance** the capital, institutions, and people who can sustain investment in the city over time.
3. **Industry** the companies and support services in the city.
4. **The State** the institutions of government and public agents who influence the development of the city.

Successful outcomes also require 'entrepreneurial activity' in all those realms. They require, not just the 'industry' realm to be entrepreneurial, but for all of the stakeholders to demonstrate an overall process and awareness which

might be called the 'entrepreneurial'.

#### A strategic approach

Tyler suggests that delivery requires a strategic approach which incorporates the following:

- An evidence-based approach that incorporates best practice, monitoring, evaluation and a clear baseline of the city's current status from which advances can be measured. Such a baseline should consider economic, physical and social problems; relative needs, priorities and objectives.
- A clear understanding of how physical changes in the city relate to the desired



effects on local people.

- Careful consideration of how the resources from key service areas are deployed to maximise the attractiveness of the city (with an emphasis on co-ordination and synergy).
- A need to ensure inclusive outcomes - a key element for success.
- That resourcing such initiatives should occur not only through conventional routes but also using other

innovative mechanisms.

Fundamentally, Tyler suggests that success is about the city getting its act together. It's about institutional change and it's about people operating together.

#### Issues of formal structures

Very few cities have achieved a reversal in their economic fortunes without a co-ordinated development agency/partnership approach. The advantages to this approach include:

- **Greater leverage of resources**
- **Economies of scale**
- **Attainment of synergy**
- **Coordination that avoids duplication, promotes specialisation and allows work on large indivisible projects.**

#### Successful partnerships require the following:

- They must avoid missing out key players and avoid overly dominant partners
- Partnership need to identify their key goals - To Do lists - and determine how they link to existing strategies
- They must have effective monitoring and review
- They need committed, fully engaged senior individuals who can offer the resources of their institutions.
- Above all they require a high level of trust.

**Tyler's analysis of the situation in Belfast:**

- Belfast has been under-performing for many years
- Many of the key resources are already in place including a quality workforce. However, there are issues around adjustments to land, capital and labour markets
- Existing partnerships are not well-linked
- There are poor linkages between local and regional government
- There is great inequality across neighbourhoods
- There is no common agenda and a lack of trust
- There are too many government departments and too much dependency on government
- There are poor linkages to the city's hinterland and the economic corridor extending through to Dublin



**The message for Belfast**

- The economic vitality of Northern Ireland hinges on the success of Belfast as a strategic cluster or economic hub
- A regeneration strategy has to look at the development of clusters and address the issue of how they will be funded and the availability of suitable sites
- It needs to identify how the city centre can be upgraded
- Belfast needs to become part of the Core Cities network
- The deep-seated problem of social exclusion must be addressed
- Service providers have to look at the delivery of quality services to citizens

To deliver this Belfast needs a partnership structure that recognises the existing urban form and can adapt to changing governance structures. The prime contender for this is a Belfast Urban Regeneration Company.

- Such a company would have to deliver:
- Strategic direction - commitment and leadership from senior individuals who can invest legitimacy and power in a core partnership board
  - Operational management from individuals with appropriate skills and technical expertise
  - Coordination and delivery of work across strategic themes.
  - A strong and well-resourced secretariat.



**Summary of the evidence**

Unsurprisingly, emerging from all three areas of research into the state of Belfast were a large number of overlapping concerns and corresponding recommendations. These were to play a central role in shaping Belfast City Council's decision to organise the Belfast: State of the City conference.

The Council, acting through its Development Department was keen to bring together the key development stakeholders to both share the conclusions from the research and allow organisations to engage more fully with the issues. The Council believed that the following areas would be of particular interest at the conference:

1. The acceptance of Belfast's linchpin role as the economic driver for Northern Ireland and the corresponding need to shape strategy to reflect this reality.
2. The crucial need to tackle issues of



competitiveness as identified by Parkinson with particular focus on population decline, skills, connectivity and innovation.

3. The role that new industries can play in strengthening future economic growth.
4. The role of the 'centre city' as a focus for economic growth and as the showcase for the city and the region plus the conceptual re-orientation of Belfast's development around the 'city centre corridor'.
5. The reinvigoration of the city's transport infrastructure to act as a spur to sustainability and growth.
6. The importance of dynamic successful neighbourhoods that are fully integrated and socially inclusive within a re-vitalised city.
7. A need for action around the weakness and confusion of urban governance in Belfast and the related need for properly functioning effective city partnerships acting upon a practical To Do list.
8. The need for a sturdy, proven development delivery mechanism that can

not only get results in a short space of time but can foster a higher degree of trust and co-operation in Belfast. ■





The Northern Ireland innovation Centre  
- venue for Belfast: State of the City conference



Nigel Hamilton  
Head of the NI Civil Service

## The conference day

A one-day conference was organised by the Council to encourage involving key individuals and organisations to engage in initial discussion around how to take forward the findings of the research.

The Council compiled a draft To Do list of actions based on the findings which, along with presentations from the researchers, formed the groundwork for debate on Belfast's future development.

Invites were sent to all of the key development organisations and government departments whose role directly link to development issues. A number of conference pre-briefings were held with many of these agencies to share with them the ideas emerging from the work.

The conference day itself, at the Northern Ireland Innovation Centre, was divided into two main sessions. A morning evidence session allowed delegates to hear about the research directly from the researchers involved.

The afternoon sessions allowed the delegates, using the Council's draft To Do list as a template, to explore what

needed to be done in the city over the next five to ten years in response to what they had learned.

## Setting the scene

The conference opened with introductions and welcomes from the **Lord Mayor Councillor Martin Morgan** and the Chair of the Development Committee, **Councillor Ian Crozier**.

A morning briefing session allowed the experts to guide delegates through the results of their research:

**Professor Michael Parkinson**  
(European Institute of Urban Affairs,  
Liverpool John Moores University)  
**Nigel Hamilton**  
(Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service)  
**Kevin McGovern**  
(Colin Buchanan and Partners)

In her own introduction to the event **Marie-Thérèse McGivern**, Director of the Council's Development Department which organised the event, described to delegates the Council's passionate commitment to making Belfast a success. She expressed the belief that living, as we do, in such revolutionary times the city itself needed to take a revolutionary perspective on the tasks ahead.

The text of all speeches and the research papers presented at the conference are available online at [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity)

**Nigel Hamilton** offered an important perspective that placed the issues in the context of the government's understanding on the future of the city.

Hamilton noted the large area of cross-over between the concerns of the Council's researchers and those of the government. He drew particular attention to the

competitiveness issue and the need to promote Belfast as the regional economic driver from Northern Ireland.

He also offered his support to the Council in its efforts to encourage a wider debate on the future of the city. He noted that the issue of leadership, transparency and accountability would be an important ingredient for success.

## The conference working groups

The afternoon session was a response to this scene-setting. The Chief Executive of the City Council, **Peter McNaney**, asked delegates, using the 'To Do' list template, to examine the major issues facing Belfast over the next five years and to agree on a series of positive, practical actions from these organisations to deal with them.

This would lead to the creation of a final agreed 'To Do' list of actions for the city.

Delegates engaged in one of three themed working groups and explored particular aspects of the To Do list. The 'Neighbourhood' group looked at neighbourhood regeneration and the issues of social inclusion and good relations. The 'Economy' group were tasked with the examining the economic restructuring and reinvigoration of the city. Finally, the 'Physical' group focussed on the physical regeneration of the city such as quality design, transport and the reinvigoration of the arterial routes.

The agreed To Dos were brought back to the conference plenary session to be recompiled as a final city To Do list. The list offers 18 key objectives for Belfast to achieve over the next few years and a number of associated actions which, if implemented, can allow the city to meet them. ■

## The To Do list

### NEIGHBOURHOOD

#### 1. Take actions to increase the population by attracting more people to live, work and play in the city

##### Actions:

- Market Belfast as a place to live
- Enhance housing opportunities by increasing supply and affordable accommodation
- Encourage new forms of high-density living in tandem with enhanced design principles
- Promote a sustainable and compact land-use model
- Promote with developers the concept of city centre living
- Encourage mixed use development through legislation and planning procedures

#### 2. Reduce the number of people living in deprivation

##### Actions:

- Enhance access to healthcare and community facilities
- Develop long-term investment strategies for tackling deprivation
- Research and identify the factors that lead to social inclusion
- Develop a holistic approach that tackles social, physical, economic and environmental issues in an integrated way
- Promote benefits of education
- Review regeneration expenditure in the city
- Promote the concept of a single regeneration strategy for the city
- Review funding mechanisms to standardise and simplify the application and approval system

#### 3. Foster greater civic responsibility and civic pride

##### Actions:

- Develop community capacity to shape regeneration plans and programmes
- Promote improved community relations
- Work with local communities to create diverse neighbourhoods
- Establish a champion to spearhead regeneration activity in the city based on inclusive working
- Promote a simplified governance structure within the city
- Create higher levels of joint working in regeneration between agencies and communities

### PHYSICAL

#### 4. Agree on standards of excellence in urban design for the city

##### Actions:

- Establish an 'Office of City Architect'
- Open a Belfast urban design centre
- Work with city developers to ensure quality design and mixed use

#### 5. Re-invigorate the centre city

##### Actions:

- Define the city centre boundary
- Implement a public realm strategy
- Promote mixed and integrated uses
- Encourage city centre living that also includes families
- Promote the city centre as a physical location for the regional driver
- Develop an investment plan that recognises and builds upon the city's spatial assets

#### 6. Promote a quality public transport infrastructure for the city

##### Actions:

- Develop a multi-modal and integrated transport system
- Increase accessibility by reducing journey times and costs
- Improve the pedestrian linkages including those between the centre and the neighbourhoods

#### 7. Promote physical regeneration along the city's arterial routes

##### Actions:

- Promote Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)
- Promote public-private partnerships
- Encourage the regeneration of communities along the city's arterial routes
- Create an appropriate regeneration delivery mechanism
- Promote the arterial routes as locations of economic activity through greater investment

#### 8. Upgrade the gateway entrances to the city

##### Actions:

- Release environmental assets for sympathetic development
- Create neutral workspaces linking the 'centre city' and the 'middle city'

#### 9. Increase linkages to the city

##### Actions:

- Promote increased air connectivity to Europe and America
- Strengthen linkages between the city and the international airport

#### 10. Release the environmental assets of the city

##### Actions:

- Develop, create access to and promote the hills, river, parks and public realm
- Link hills and open spaces
- Link the city to the Lagan

### ECONOMY

#### 11. Take actions to increase entrepreneurship in the city

##### Actions:

- Stimulate continued development in emerging sectors such as creative and knowledge-based industries
- Develop a plan for our creative industries
- Develop fiscal measures that will help stimulate entrepreneurship through increased investment
- Promote entrepreneurship through all levels of education
- Develop a plan to identify and address risk adverse issues

#### 12. Strengthen and promote the city's indigenous industries

##### Actions:

- Promote development across the city's industry sectors
- Address specific issues around particular industries such as manufacturing
- Conduct research to identify and understand employer needs
- Develop a growth plan that will match skills to industry requirements
- Promote on-the-job training schemes to alleviate attrition rates
- Encourage balanced economic growth by recognising the importance of different sectors in development plans
- Identify and address sector-specific issues that hinder growth

#### 13. Take cohesive action to increase R&D and levels of innovation in the city

##### Actions:

- Research the factors that encourage greater innovation and nurture these
- Strengthen links between stakeholders and the universities

### ALL GROUPS

#### 14. Seek to attract new industries to the city

##### Actions:

- Encourage greater inward investment
- Identify potential locations for the 'clustering' of industries
- Encourage life-long learning amongst citizens

#### 15. Re-invigorate the city's neighbourhoods

##### Actions:

- Develop greater mobility and connectivity within and among neighbourhoods
- Protect and enhance local neighbourhood centres
- Encourage greater investment into deprived neighbourhoods

#### 16. Promote Belfast as a regional driver which benefits the development of the whole region

##### Actions:

- Encourage a private-sector led economy
- Develop and promote the rationale for Belfast as Northern Ireland's economic driver
- Address competing interests between the Region, BMA and Belfast
- Address different spatial perceptions and realities across the region

- Promote enhanced integrated working at all levels to link between regional, city and local initiatives and programmes
- Prioritise public sector strategies around spatial plans

#### 17. Promote employability and increase the skill base in the city

##### Actions:

- Develop local employment initiatives
- Identify and address barriers to employability
- Identify and address reasons for unemployment
- Encourage a culture which places greater value on education

#### 18. Increase brownfield development

##### Actions:

- Promote a new city 'land bank' to attract key inward investment
- Release redundant road infrastructure for development
- Create a cohesive land-use based economic plan for the city
- Increase brownfield development within the city
- Encourage brownfield site development through all emerging spatial plans
- Promote indigenous industry growth by providing suitable packaged land and/or premises within the city's neighbourhoods. ■



(l to r) Kevin McGovern, Colin Buchanan and Partners; Peter McNaney, Chief Executive, Belfast City Council; Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, Belfast City Council; Nigel Hamilton, Head of the NI Civil Service; Prof. Michael Parkinson, Liverpool John Moores; Cllr Ian Crozier, Chair of Development, Belfast City Council.

## The plenary session

The afternoon plenary session also allowed the Chairmen from each of the three working groups to, not only feed back on the 'To Do' list, but also to raise other points of note and concern. These are summarised below:

### Neighbourhood sub-group (Chaired by Eddie Jackson, Belfast Local Strategy Partnership)

- There was strong endorsement for the model of an urban regeneration company.
- There was an awareness of the physical and economic issue but also an awareness of the importance of culture, community relations, and quality of life at the neighbourhood level and the fact that these have to be tackled in parallel.
- There is a lack of co-ordination both at a central level and at local levels.
- There is a need for a devolved functional administration at regional level: a need for city government at appropriate levels and need for a mechanism that bring coherence to all of the efforts that are currently being made.

- A need for a shared civic identity that is backed by a cross-party leadership and engagement.
- The City Council should use its convening authority to bring together the right level of high powered executive team, responsible for strategies and resources to take decisions.
- Incremental advances should be initiated immediately - the city cannot wait for the perfect solution.
- There is a need to address key contentious issues such as flags and emblems and related issues to create the conditions within which neighbourhoods have an opportunity to derive economic benefit.
- The city centre should be promoted unashamedly as shared space.
- The city should celebrate diversity and have a grown-up conversation about those celebratory events.
- The city needs to foster a supportive environment for neighbourhoods to help them to look upwards and well as outwards.
- It is unreasonable to expect that all solutions can come from bottom up initiatives. There must be leadership.

### Physical sub-group

(Chaired by Dawson Stelfox, Consare)

- There was strong agreement on Peter Tyler's suggestion for a urban regeneration company.
- There is a need for excellence in design quality based on a set of design standards
- There should be better training for designers and architects in Belfast
- A need to match the requirements of developers with the training provided by universities
- The promotion of a design centre for the city to explain good design and bring the concepts to the community.
- A public adoption of the policy for architecture that was published by the Arts Council last year.
- The creation of an office of the city architect - a design champion for the city.
- An emphasis on the demands of the 'middle city' - areas which have suffered with the fracturing between the city centre and the outer suburbs.
- Increased awareness of the value of the public realm and the implementation of the public realm strategy.
- An awareness of the critical nature of transportation in the city
- There is a general consensus though that Belfast City Council doesn't have the necessary powers but should take on the mantle as lead democratic body to drive forward the debate.

### Economy sub-group

(Chaired by Paul Clarke, Deloitte)

- There was strong agreement on Peter Tyler's suggestion for some form of Urban Regeneration Company (URC). The proposals needed to be supported at a high level politically and instigated in the very near future.
- All stakeholders in the city needed to be involved in the process.

- There is a need to fully exploit the city's 'crown jewels' - including the universities, the ports and airports. All such assets had to be examined for their potential.
- Local government needed to be involved at a crucial level - although progress should not wait on the Review of Public Administration.
- A bigger focus was required on education entrepreneurship.
- A focus on new industries and not just high-valued, technology-driven industries but also on service industries and retail.
- Training in the city is not working effectively - perhaps training money needs to be placed with the private sector.
- On the issue of Research and Development, the role of the universities in the city is key.
- Economic matters are not solely about the economy - it is an inter-related subject which is influenced by a large number of factors. Any new approach has to be shaped by this understanding
- Political leadership is required if the process is to successfully engage all of the economic stakeholders using a multifunctional vehicle. ■



Head of Sheffield City Council Bob Kerslake speaking at Belfast's Waterfront Hall.

### Sheffield - a lesson learned?

Many of the decisions made by delegates during the conference were affirmed by the experiences of the conference VIP speaker, Mr Bob Kerslake of Sheffield City Council, who spoke at the evening conference dinner at Belfast's Waterfront Hall.

Sheffield in many ways offers Belfast an excellent real-life example of the power of co-ordinated urban regeneration. The city has suffered the same slow and tortuous decline in its once strong manufacturing base and - while, of course, not experiencing Belfast's political upheavals - has had to deal with an almost root and branch restructuring in response to the demands of the twenty-first century.

Kerslake, who is also a non-executive director on the Board of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, noted that in the mid-1980s Sheffield lost a quarter of its jobs and as a result ended up with some of the most deprived wards in all of the UK. Even by the mid 1990s the portents for recovery were not good. The city had a poor reputation; it had lost any sense of leadership; and the forecast for the future was pretty much more of the same.

Kerslake explained that the foundations for Sheffield's eventual recovery were firmly linked to a combination of things such as "...macro economic stability, good regional and urban policies with effective external alliances, and, of course, a strong city partnership and plan."

Sheffield formed a partnership in the 1990s called 'Sheffield First' which brought together the key players in the city to create an impressive mechanism for ensuring that the city focussed on the things that Sheffield needed for success.

"We worked on a number of features which we knew that any successful city must have and we needed to make sure Sheffield had them too", says Kerslake.

These factors, not surprisingly, bear a striking resemblance to those described in Michael Parkinson's research on competitive cities and included a strong economy; a well-educated workforce; a vibrant city centre; attractive, successful neighbourhoods; a healthy population; low crime; good transport systems; good cultural and sporting offer; that the city is cosmopolitan and inclusive and that it is well-run, sustainable and well regarded.

Sheffield First authored a city centre masterplan which pro-actively harnessed the use of each of the partners' powers and assets to put the economy first - in a process that was commercially driven.

Kerslake notes that Sheffield is on a path to recover but hasn't yet reached its destination. The city certainly has had an economic revival but not yet the transformation that Sheffield First is aiming for over the long term. Although Sheffield has been performing strongly on various social indicators, Kerslake maintains that, unfortunately, the city is still vulnerable without the necessary economic transformation.

What are the key lessons from Sheffield? Kerslake was keen for Belfast to learn from his own city's experiences. He was at pains to note that future prosperity is not necessarily linked to recent history. The role of a powerful delivery mechanism, such as Sheffield First, is paramount. Once it got its act together Sheffield City Council offered a strong leadership role which again was a key catalyst in the advances made. "We put a powerful delivery mechanism in place and with strong leadership from the Council we built good external alliances. We haven't rest on our laurels and, frankly, I don't think we ever can. Success is built on regular and honest reviews. If it's not working then don't be afraid to change - we're not."

**Find out more at:**  
<http://www.sheffieldfirst.net>



high level recommendations which needed to be implemented immediately.

1. Stakeholders in the city should be asked to agree to the **To Do list** - this means not only agreeing with the content but ensuring that the appropriate mechanisms and plans are in place to achieve them.

2. Relevant organisations who had been unable to attend the conference should be fully briefed and engaged on the issues and **their commitment sought** on the advancement of the To Do list.



3. It was agreed that Belfast City Council was best placed in the city to act as the central keeper of the To Do list - it has a **'champion' role to play** in ensuring that stakeholders remain committed to the list.

4. Further research should be instigated on a number of areas of concern brought up during the conference. This included work on the concept of the **Urban Regeneration Company**.

5. Likewise further research was required on the role of the city as the **economic regional driver**.



6. Strong partnerships have to be developed between the stakeholders - an emphasis on 'joined-up' urban development. An evaluation needs to be carried out on **existing partnership structures** within the city.

7. And finally, the conference should be **reconvened on an annual basis** to measure progress and to keep focus.

Belfast City Council will be testing these conclusions and recommendations during autumn 2004 and will bring its results back to the city's stakeholders. ■



Belfast: State of the City was organised by a conference team made up of members of staff from across the sections of Belfast City Council's Development Department.

## Information resources

### Website

The Council is maintaining a **Belfast: State of the City** website. We will publish conference related documents, speeches and presentations and use the site as a vehicle for continuing to inform partners.

You can find further information at [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity)

If you wish to be added to the Belfast: State of the City email list please send an email to [development@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:development@belfastcity.gov.uk)

### Publications

The following publications are available from the Council and form the basis of the background to the conference. The material is also available for download from the conference website.

**Belfast: A Competitive City?**  
Prof Michael Parkinson, European Institute of Urban Affairs (2004)

**The Belfast: Masterplan**  
Kevin McGovern et al,  
Colin Buchanan & Partners (2004)

**The Belfast To-Do list**  
Belfast City Council (2004)

**Turning Belfast Around**  
Dr Peter Tyler, Director of Studies in Land Economy and Economics,  
St Catharine's College (2004)

## Delegate organisations

Andersonstown News  
AWG Residential Limited  
Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce  
Belfast City Airport  
Belfast City Centre Management  
Belfast City Council  
Belfast Education and Library Board  
Belfast Festival at Queen's  
Belfast First Stop Shop  
Belfast Harbour Commissioners  
Belfast Healthy Cities  
Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education  
Belfast Local Strategy Partnership  
Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau  
Belfast Women's Training Services  
Blueprint Development Company  
Bombardier Aerospace  
BTW Shiells  
Colin Buchanan and Partners  
Colin Stutt Consulting  
Community Arts Forum  
Community Foundation for NI  
Community Initiatives SEUPB  
Community Relations Council  
Consarc Design Group  
CUSP Ltd.  
Deloitte MCS Ltd.  
Delta Packaging Ltd.  
Department for Regional Development,  
Regional Planning and Transportation  
Department for Social Development  
Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment  
Department of Finance and Personnel  
Department of the Environment, Roads Service  
East Belfast Enterprise  
East Belfast Partnership Board  
Equality and Diversity Unit, DETI  
European Institute for Urban Affairs  
Grand Opera House

Greater Village Regeneration Trust  
GVA Grimley  
Happening  
Heritage Lottery Fund  
Invest NI  
Investment Belfast  
Laganside Corporation  
Landscape Institute  
McAlear & Rushe  
NI Housing Executive  
North Belfast Partnership Board  
North City Business Centre  
Northern Ireland Civil Service  
Northern Ireland Science Park  
Northern Ireland Tourist Board  
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Community Action Unit  
Park Avenue Hotel  
Planning Service - BMAP  
Planning Service, Department of the Environment  
PricewaterhouseCoopers  
Proteus NI Ltd  
Regional Development Executive  
Research and Regional Services  
Royal Group of Hospitals  
Royal Society of Ulster Architects  
RTPI Irish Branch (Northern Section)  
School of Architecture, Queen's University of Belfast  
School of Built Environment, University of Ulster  
School of Geography, Queen's University of Belfast  
School of Marketing, University of Ulster  
Scottish Enterprise Glasgow  
Small Business Research Centre  
South Belfast Partnership Board  
Studies in Land and Economics  
Sustainable Development Committee  
Training & Employment Agency  
Translink  
University of Ulster  
Urban Institute Ireland  
W5  
Waterfront Hall