A one-day design workshop delivered by PLACE, the Architecture & Built Environment Centre for Northern Ireland

In association with:
ILEX University of Ulster
DOE DRD DSD Derry City Council Translink
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1. Introductions

Reconnecting the City
Derry has fantastic urban assets. There are a wide range of Government Departments, public agencies, private companies and others that have roles in looking after, creating and shaping the environment. They all work to help deliver a dynamic economy and vibrant society. Harbour Square is a major civic space where the interest and influence of all stakeholders overlap.

All stakeholders question the nature of our public realm: What makes our place special? How do we build on this essence to nurture it to thrive for future generations to enjoy? Can we benefit from joined up thinking? How do we deliver leadership for successful places?

The intention of this workshop was to provide a forum for us to work together to discuss, share ideas and possibly create temporary interventions to develop, protect and enhance this place.

The Group Training Workshops on the day were led by Professor Liza Fior.

Attendees
Maurice Devenney (Mayor of Derry), Michael Hegarty (PLACE), Paul Clarke (UU), Liza Fior (muif), Maura Fox (DoE), Mary MacIntyre (DoE), Paul Duffy (DoE), Tony McIvor (DoE), Dermot MacRandal (DoE), Katrina Hope (DoE), Jim Campbell (Roads Service), Alan Keys (Roads Service), Laurence McCullagh (ILEX), Tom McCartney (ILEX), Aideen McGinley (ILEX), Judith Gray (ILEX), Sean Currie (ILEX), John Quinn (SWG ILEX), Kevin McGovern (SWG ILEX), Colin Kennedy (DCC), Martin Quigg (DSD), Brian Doherty (DSD), Tony McDaid (Translink), Una Morrison (NI Water), Marie McCartney (NI Water), Fiona Teague (Healthy Cities)

Opening speeches
“This is an exciting opportunity to devise a project which will set the standard and achieve a special space for the city. This model of collaborative thinking can very quickly change the city and set the pace leading into 2013.” - Aideen McGinley, ILEX

“Working together to create a plan is important but doing it is even more vital for Derry.” - Brian Doherty, DSD

“Everyone sees a space and uses a space in a different way so making good places requires collaboration. We must have an arrival space which complements the city and bridge.” - Mary McIntyre, DoE
2. Summary of Options Considered

**Bus Route**
Implementing a right turn system for buses exiting the Bus Station onto Foyle Embankment would ensure the bus traffic does not have to use the Harbour Square Roundabout for U-turns. Bus Traffic would turn right towards Craigavon Bridge, thereby decreasing bus movements past the Peace Bridge and through Harbour Square.

It is broadly agreed that implementing a right turn movement as an early intervention will open up further possibilities for improvements in the area and reduces dependence on the Harbour Square Roundabout.

**New Street**
There is potential for a new street to run from opposite 17-21 Foyle Street alongside the Bus Station towards the Peace Bridge to join the Foyle Embankment.

The new street could accommodate displaced traffic from any future pedestrianisation of Whitaker Street.

Buses could exit onto this new street. It was also suggested that buses could exit onto Water Street if the Station yard was reconfigured.

**Bus Station Reconfiguration & Arrival Space**
The entrance to the bus station could open out onto a new civic space on the old City Hotel site. As passengers leave the Station they arrive at a square which provides views of the Peace Bridge and the Guildhall. This would help orientate visitors and create a greater sense of arrival (a starting point to explore from).

The development potential of the old City Hotel land was also noted but the idea of a public space was largely favoured instead. It was noted that the land is in government ownership so the site’s potential could be further assessed at a later stage.
Whitaker Street Pedestrianisation

There is a natural vista from the Peace Bridge along Whitaker Street towards Shipquay Street. There is also a good view from the City Walls towards the Peace Bridge along Whitaker Street. It is suggested that Whitaker Street be pedestrianised and upgraded with quality public realm to create a unique connection between the Bus Station, Walled City, Guildhall Square, Peace Bridge, Foyle River and Ebrington Barracks.

In the future, with the development of Ebrington Barracks, this could become a key route between the city and the barracks – particularly if an event is being held at Ebrington Barracks. Pedestrianising Whitaker Street allows for activities to take place during festivals when the Peace Bridge is used by people walking to the city from the east.

Lane Reduction

There was broad agreement that reducing the number of lanes and moving the road away from the river’s edge should be explored.

It is suggested that two broad extents of landscaped public realm either side of the road would create the impression that cars were sharing the space and were ‘allowed’ to pass through the pedestrian’s area. This in turn could help to slow traffic movement and create a safer environment.

It was noted that other key routes have less lanes and the current number of lanes passing through Harbour Square was questioned. Roads Service noted that Harbour Square carries between 20 – 25,000 vehicles per day.
Segregation vs. Sharing
A discussion arose around the potential for creating a shared surface area at Harbour Square. But the current thinking that ‘segregation is safety’ was noted as a potential obstacle to this idea being furthered.

The example of the quay wall was mentioned and the need for such a barrier to connectivity between the bridge and city was questioned.

It was suggested that any public realm works at Harbour Square could be a pilot experimental zone in which the normal cultural ethos of segregation is left to the side and an integrated shared space is implemented. It was proposed that this could be used (with the backdrop of the City of Culture) to challenge public understanding of urban spaces, the use of spaces and priorities within such spaces.

The quay wall was highlighted on numerous occasions as creating a disconnection between the Peace Bridge, the river, and the city. Legislation and safety considerations led to the quay wall but it was highlighted that safety can be more integration.

Reclaiming Space
The idea of gradually reclaiming space from the roadway appealed to most in attendance. Redistributing the land balance along the river front was felt to be vital to creating a space which could be used year round for key events following 2013 such as the Film Festival, Halloween and New Year’s Eve celebrations. A reduction in road space and creation of a public realm would also provide an improved setting for the two historic buildings overlooking Harbour Square and would create a welcoming environment.

Quality Public Realm
There was general agreement that the quality of the existing spaces around Harbour Square is poor and that a mix of ownership and priorities had led to a disjointed public realm. Through collaboration at later stages in the process this would be discussed in more detail.

It was suggested that addressing this in the short term as an early intervention could be a quick and relatively straightforward improvement. However, there was also concern that a quick fix would distract from the wider ambitions for Harbour Square.
**Alternative Road Surface**

When discussing the options for traffic calming it was suggested that large timbers could be used to create an alternative surface area to tarmac. This could encourage drivers to slow as they enter an unusual area which may also improve safety because drivers would be more alert to their unusual surroundings. The timbers would have a historical importance and would create another layer of interest in any future public realm scheme.

**Crossing the road**

There was broad support for a more innovative crossing point between the bridge and the city. Ideas ranged from utilising different materials (as mentioned above), to super crossings (similar to zebra crossings), to stopping all traffic from entering the Harbour Square area for a brief period (to allow people to cross at any point).

It was suggested that another approach could be taken to ensure that the area where the bridge lands does not become "a place to get to and press a button to cross", but instead becomes a landing space to dwell, relax and appreciate the immediate surroundings and the further views.

**Embracing the River**

Along the river’s edge it was broadly agreed that more public space was required and that the road could be moved away from the river edge. It was claimed that the edge treatment to the river will be key to bringing people to the Foyle and ensuring an active river front.

It was noted that the car park at Queens Quay will be removed and landscaped with a walkway and cycle route soon. When this is implemented it should be designed with any future development of the river front public realm in mind.

The potential for leisure craft to tie up along the waterfront at Harbour Square was discussed. Pier areas that would stretch onto the river and floating steps that would lead down to the river were considered as ways of embracing the Foyle.

As the river is fast flowing at the Harbour Square and Peace Bridge area it was suggested that this could be harnessed to power an upgraded public realm – e.g. lighting or events.
**Peace Bridge connection**

It was decided that, as an initial first step, attempts would be made to remove a parking sign which blocks views of the bridge. There was general acceptance that there is a disconnection of moment between the city and the bridge for pedestrians at present.

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**City Hotel**

Improved connections from the City Hotel to the Peace Bridge, river, Harbour Square and the city centre were identified as necessary. Suggestions included a raised crossing table between the hotel and Victoria Market car park which currently has no assisted crossing in place.

The parking area in front of the City Hotel was discussed and it was largely recognised that better use could be made of this area to connect city visitors into the future public realm scheme.

The connection between the hotel and river was also identified as an essential upgrade to be brought forward. There is currently no crossing point from the hotel to the river area.

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**Victoria Market Car Park**

It was suggested that the car park entry and exit arrangements could be reviewed. Opening up access to Police Court Street would remove traffic from the Harbour Square area and allow for a public realm scheme which could stretch along to the Custom House and link with the already upgraded Custom House Street. The access road in front of the Custom House could be closed to traffic (except service access) to allow for an upgraded public space in front of the restaurant.

It was highlighted that altering access to Victoria Market car park and the road in front of the Custom House could act as early interventions requiring relatively little investment.
Shipquay Street
A suggested long term vision involved the pedestrianisation of Shipquay Street with service access maintained. This would connect with an upgraded Whitaker Street and the Peace Bridge creating a quality pedestrian corridor between the Walled City and Ebrington Barracks.

Waterloo Place Area
Discussions were had surrounding the potential long term benefits for Waterloo Place and identifying how this area could be better utilised.
3. Next Steps

**Testing the options**
It was suggested that a week or weekend could be chosen to test the impact of reducing road space by coning off lanes. This would allow Roads Service to carry out testing and modeling exercises and provide stakeholders with the confidence to continue forward with a full public realm scheme.

**Reconvening the Group**
At the conclusion of the day it was determined that the group would reconvene at a date yet to be determined in Autumn / Winter 2011. In the interim period a smaller cross departmental group will take the options forward and prepare deliverable actions. At the next full meeting everyone will gather to assess and critique the more advanced options prepared by the smaller group.

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