

# COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

## An Advisory Council to the Department of the Environment

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1 April 2010

Kerrie Sweeney  
Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit  
Development Department  
Belfast City Council  
4-10 Linenhall Street  
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Dear Kerrie

### **Draft Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010-2014**

CNCC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Strategy. Much of the content of this document is outside of our remit and area of competence, but we have a number of comments to make, set out below.

1. It is refreshing to see so much reference to the environmental assets of the city and its surrounding hinterland, which sets Belfast very much in the context of a wider Northern Ireland. This is particularly well documented in the section on the Spatial Dimension of Tourism on p.10, with the key spatial principles well set out, to include the natural assets, visual landmarks, safe and attractive access corridors (including a lot of green space) and the green connections that incorporate environmental sustainability.
2. We welcome the explicit mention of some of the important green areas in the Tourism Areas section (p.11-12), including the Belfast Hills, Belfast Zoo and the Connswater Greenway and its link to the Castlereagh Hills. We would have liked to see some reference to the important wildlife assets of these areas, including the birdlife on Belfast Lough, and the Red Squirrel population of Belvoir Forest.
3. We welcome the identification of the Lagan Corridor (p.17) as an important connecting route for the city, highlighting the green spaces, though the omission of Belvoir Park Forest is surprising. The map also shows the significant lack of any green space within the Titanic Quarter.
4. CNCC welcomes the 'Greenways' strategy outlined on p.18, building on the green spaces throughout the city.

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5. Visionary Drivers (p.20-28)

- Titanic Signature project – we remain concerned about the absence of green space within this area. While this was an industrial landscape, its redevelopment gives an opportunity to introduce some open areas with trees and vegetation, which would make it much more attractive.
- Belfast Hills and Belfast Zoo – we welcome the prominence given to these areas, and agree on the need for innovative access, though this must be carefully thought out so that it does not in itself radically change the character of the hills in an unacceptable way e.g. a funicular railway at Cave Hill. While the viewpoints of Divis and Cave Hill are stunning destinations in themselves, the walk to them is very much part of the experience and should be part of the ‘package’. The Zoo has great potential, not merely to show exotic animals, but also to exhibit and impart messages about our own fauna, particularly threatened or endangered species. This could include the attractive Red Squirrel, which can be seen in the wild within Belfast City.
- River Lagan – we would again stress the green spaces along the river banks, and the role that they can play. We welcome the proposal to include walking and cycle routes, but stress the need to physically separate them from the busy roads that run beside the river. It would help if traffic could be reduced on these roads, to avoid devaluing the whole experience of the river corridor.

6. Development Levers (p.23-25)

- City Presentation and design Initiatives – this section would benefit from mention of green spaces, which are an essential ingredient of good urban design and a vital part of the city experience.
- Green and Open spaces – we welcome the inclusion of the North Foreshore, and suggest a more explicit mention of its wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Events – we have some concern that some green spaces e.g. Botanic Gardens could be seen only as venues for events, and developed as such. These are important spaces in their own right, and need to be looked after as such.

7. Infrastructure, Services and Environment (p.26-27) – we welcome the emphasis on the Rapid Transport Strategy, and the idea of moving along the river. More explicit mention of way-marked walking routes would have been useful in this section.

8. Management and Co-ordination (p.40) – The Review of Public Administration, with its proposed devolution of powers, including planning, to Belfast City Council, will give opportunities for much more joined-up thinking, enabling local plans to tie in closely with the Tourism Strategy, thereby protecting and enhancing the important assets that contribute to the qualities of the city that attract tourist activity. The role of the Tourism Co-ordinating Group will be essential here, and we are disappointed that there is apparently no voice for the natural environment or sustainability on this body. In the light of the prominence given to green spaces and the environment generally within this strategy we would urge that this serious gap is addressed by including relevant bodies or individuals.

Yours sincerely



**PATRICK CASEMENT**  
**CHAIRMAN**