



**Comments from Imtac on the consultation on Draft Linen
Quarter public realm analysis and vision**

March 2016

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Making our information accessible

As an organisation of and for disabled people and older people Imtac recognises that the way information is provided can be a barrier to accessing services and participation in public life. We are committed to providing information about our work in formats that best suit the needs of individuals.

All our documents are available in hard copy in 14pt type size as standard. We also provide word and pdf versions of our documents on our website – www.imtac.org.uk. In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats. These formats include:

- Large print
- Audio cassette or CD
- Daisy disc
- Braille
- Electronic copies on disc or via email in PDF or word
- Easy read

We will also provide information about our work in other languages if you require this.

If you would like this publication in any of the formats listed above or if you have any other information requirements please contact:

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About us

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

General Comments

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Linen Quarter public realm analysis and vision. The Committee agrees with Belfast City Council that the Linen Quarter represents an important part of the City Centre and welcomes proposals for regeneration in the area. We would also like to commend the Council for organising a workshop where organisations of and for disabled people could learn more about the proposals and give their views.

Comments on the analysis and vision

Imtac's offices are located in the Linen Quarter. The Committee agrees with much of the analysis of the existing public realm. From our perspective the major issues with the existing public realm include:

- Poorly maintained pavements which are narrow in places
- An absence of safe and accessible opportunities to cross busy roads
- An absence of dropped kerbs and at junctions and vehicle entrances that create barriers for disabled people, often meaning the only accessible route is the carriageway

- An area dominated by the car including substantial legal and illegal parking and numerous vehicle entrances to buildings where cars have priority over pedestrians
- Clutter on pavements including A Boards and unregulated and inappropriate pavement cafés

For many disabled people and older people, including Imtac members, the public realm in the area is a hostile place making even short journeys difficult or impossible. The public realm in the area is in dire need of improvement.

Two other issues need to be considered in planning changes to the area. Firstly Great Victoria Street, Bedford Street and Adelaide are serviced by Metro and Ulsterbus services and are key areas for people arriving and departing the city by public transport. Bus infrastructure in the area is currently far from ideal with access to stops often restricted by other vehicles. Secondly Imtac has undertaken a number of parking surveys¹ in Belfast city centre that indicate that around 80 Blue Badge holders currently park in on-street parking bays in the Linen Quarter. It is important that changes to parking provision in the area does not restrict the mobility of disabled people.

There is also a great deal of commonality between the Councils and Imtacs vision for the area. We would like to see the following reflected in changes to the public realm of the area:

- Streets and public space that are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all users
- An area that prioritises a safe and accessible environment for pedestrians
- A reduction in the impact of, but not the removal of, vehicles in the area
- Enhanced parking opportunities for Blue Badge holders and enhanced accessibility for public transport in the area

¹ [Report on surveys of Blue Badge use in Belfast City Centre undertaken in September and October 2014 \(Imtac 2015\)](#)

Imtac does have reservations with aspects of the detail of the vision set out in the consultation report. Some of our reservations have been allayed by assurances given at the workshop. Detailed elements we would like to be included in the vision include:

- A commitment to retain kerbs on all streets within the Linen Quarter in line with Imtacs current policy²
- Increased pedestrian priority on all streets including broader pavements, safe and accessible crossing opportunities and pedestrian priority at vehicle entrances
- A commitment to manage street furniture, including pavement cafes, to ensure clear, barrier free pedestrian access
- Retention of some parking including increased accessible parking provision
- Enhanced accessibility for public transport infrastructure in the area

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment at an early stage of the Linen Quarter project. The Committee recognises that there is still much detail to develop. On-going engagement with disabled and older people is crucial in ensuring that any changes made are inclusive, balancing the sometimes differing requirements of people. The Committee recommends that the Council continue engagement with Imtac and other organisations of and for disabled people at each stage of the project.

² [Imtac position on the retention of kerbs \(Imtac March 2015\)](#)