



STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2023-2025





THE CATHEDRAL QUARTER

The Cathedral Quarter is a historically significant part of Belfast with some of the oldest remaining streetscapes and buildings in the city. The area's historic cobbled streets and distinctive entries are home to an exciting mix of arts, culture, heritage, hospitality and business - all of which sit in close proximity to two major city landmarks, St Anne's Cathedral and the new campus for Ulster University.

The Cathedral Quarter is a key shared and diverse area in Belfast with students, workers, visitors from near and far and citizens of all backgrounds regularly traversing its historic streets.

Like many other cultural quarters around the world, the Cathedral Quarter has emerged from a post-industrial landscape of disused warehouses and dilapidated buildings. First mooted as a potential cultural hub in the 1970's at the height of 'the Troubles', Northside, as it was then called, was gradually populated by local creative thinkers who recognised the area's potential. Eventually, in 1997, the Laganside Corporation¹ adopted part of Northside as a strategic link from the River Lagan to the city-centre and also launched what is now known as the Cathedral Quarter.

The vision for regeneration of the area was based on a mixed economy model where private investment worked alongside public funding to create a place where arts and culture mixed seamlessly with the commercial and hospitality sectors to offer a unique and authentic experience for visitors and local people alike.

Urban environments are constantly changing and the Cathedral Quarter has experienced both ups and downs – prior to COVID, the Trust had achieved many successes in helping to establish the Quarter as Belfast's cultural hub, with thousands of visitors coming to the area each year to attend festivals and arts events, such as

1. The Laganside Corporation formed in 1989 was a non-departmental public body with the goal of regenerating land adjacent to the River Lagan. The corporation was wound up in 2007 with its responsibilities transferred to DSD now Department for Communities.

CQT's flagship Culture Night event.

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The Cathedral Quarter faces ongoing and new challenges. Longstanding development blight exists on one side of the area causing dilapidated streetscapes, dereliction and building neglect. Added to this has been a post Covid increase in homelessness, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour, this was set against a context of inadequate city cleansing, maintenance and policing coming out of the pandemic.

The causes are interweaving; a loss of footfall due to the prolonged absence of visitors and workers during the pandemic combined with the previous blocked footfall caused by the 2018 Primark fire road closure. As of 2023 some of these issues are slowly being addressed and the new University Campus and a resident student population is bringing new footfall through parts of the area.

Alongside these challenges, stalled development projects such as 'Tribeca Belfast', cause urban blight along with the post-COVID shift to working from home. Businesses in the area, particularly those in the cultural and hospitality sectors that were weakened by the impact of the pandemic are further threatened by an unprecedented rise in costs and inflation. The broader economic context also presents significant challenges with major infrastructure projects that directly impact on the Quarter either stalled or in development limbo.

Despite all of these challenges, the Cathedral Quarter remains a special place in the city; welcoming, creative, diverse and edgy. In an era where we must address a low carbon future, the eminently repairable buildings of the area embody not just sustainable bricks and mortar but 'embodied energy' in every sense. The work of safeguarding, animating and promoting this special place provides the context in which this Plan has been developed and in which the Cathedral Quarter Trust operates.



CATHEDRAL QUARTER TRUST

The Cathedral Quarter Trust (CQT) is a registered charity representing a cross-section of interest groups and stakeholders in the Cathedral Quarter area. Established in 2012, the Trust was developed from an earlier incarnation, the Cathedral Quarter Steering Group, set up in 2008 by the then Department for Social Development..

Current CQT Trustees include representatives from arts, culture and heritage, hospitality and business and CQ-based entities including Belfast Cathedral and Ulster University.

OUR VISION for the Cathedral Quarter is as...

"...the beating heart of Belfast; a welcoming, inclusive and culturally-vibrant area, celebrating its distinctive heritage and animating its creative future."

with a MISSION

"...to champion the artistic, cultural and heritage-focused regeneration of a thriving Cathedral Quarter."

CQT's core aim is to represent the interests of the Quarter as one of the city's most historic areas and to safeguard the place of arts, culture and heritage in CQ.

Our activity includes advocacy, partnership and collaboration, and is aimed at ensuring arts, culture and heritage remains central in the Cathedral Quarter and the area's reputation as the cultural 'heart' of the city is reinforced.

The Trust works with a wide range of city partners and stakeholders, including Belfast City Council, Department for Communities, Belfast Buildings Trust and the Destination CQ Business Improvement District (CQ BID).



The Ogham Grove, Culture Night Belfast 2021

CULTURE NIGHT BELFAST A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

CQT set up Culture Night Belfast (CNB) in 2009 and annually, led on delivery and development of the event up until 2021. The city's largest free cultural celebration, Culture Night grew from c15,000 attendees in 2009 to a height of c100,000 people for the two-day 2019 event. While very popular with the public, the exponential growth of the event presented an increasing challenge for the Trust in terms of resource, capacity to deliver and operational complexity. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the suspension of the event in September 2020 – with a digital version staged instead. In the same year we also commissioned a Strategic Review of the event in partnership with Belfast City Council.

Following the Review, which highlighted the challenges of the existing event format, we initiated a period of intense reflection about the future direction of travel for Culture Night Belfast. Part of this process of reflection led to the delivery of CNB21 Presents the Ogham Grove, a large-scale outdoor installation which marked a departure from the usual Culture Night format.

Up until early 2023, CQT was working on the development of a new flagship event for the city, incorporating the recommendations and feedback from the Strategic Review. As a result of funding cuts to CQT, however, this work has been put on hold indefinitely.



VISION FOR THE CATHEDRAL QUARTER 2023 – 2025

We want to do our utmost to help to address the challenges that the Cathedral Quarter faces.

The current outlook for the Cathedral Quarter is challenging and complex – the area has been impacted by a combination of long-term, structural local factors that have been exacerbated by global events such as the pandemic, the economic crisis and the climate crisis.

We believe, however, that there is always an opportunity to effect positive change; even if on a small-scale basis. Drawing on the combined expertise and reputation of our Board members we will use a renewed focus on advocacy, collaboration and partnership to ensure that the Cathedral Quarter continues to be a unique place with arts, culture and history at its heart.





OUR VALUES

Our work over the coming years will be centred around our core values:

INCLUSION

Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect; to express and develop their creativity; and participate in the artistic and cultural life of the City. We will celebrate diversity.

COURAGE

In achieving our ambitious mission; we are committed to showing determination, dynamism and leadership.

MUTUALITY

We are committed to working collaboratively with others, and providing mutual support as the best way of achieving a vibrant Cathedral Quarter.

CREATIVITY

We are passionate about the transformative power of creativity. We aim to continue to be a special place for inspiration and innovation.

QUALITY

We are committed to excellence in all aspects of our work. We will be open and transparent in all our activities. We will show integrity in our dealings with others.

OUR PRIORITIES FOR 2023 – 2025

Our priorities for the next three years will centre on the place, the culture, the people and the partnerships of the Cathedral Quarter, with a renewed focus on organisational resilience and stability.

Celebrating the distinctive character of the Cathedral Quarter.

Promote and safeguard the distinctive heritage, character and environs of the area, encouraging sensitive development in and around the Cathedral Quarter.

WE WILL:

- *Provide leadership in advocating for the cultural heritage of the area and raising issues and concerns*
- *Engage effectively with decision-makers and influencers*
- *Campaign for development of appropriate balanced plans for the area*
- *Advocate for proposals in the creative use of vacant buildings and open spaces*
- *Promote and influence management of appropriate public spaces and streetscape and their successful use*
- *Work closely with relevant organisations and partners to protect the streetscape and buildings of historic or architectural interest*
- *Work in partnership with other CQ and city-centre stakeholders including DCQ BID, Belfast Chamber of Commerce, Belfast City Centre Management, Belfast Harbour Commissioners and Belfast Civic Trust*

Sustaining and developing arts and culture in the Cathedral Quarter

Uphold and promote the place of arts, culture and heritage within the Quarter.

WE WILL:

- *Work with BCC and other stakeholders to support CQ within 2024 Year of Culture*
- *Showcase the cultural assets of the Cathedral Quarter*
- *Work with appropriate stakeholders and partners to realise the potential of the heritage and cultural assets of the area*
- *Support the development of new kinds of arts, culture and heritage activities in the CQ*
- *Nurture and sustain a cohesive and thriving arts and culture sector and workforce in the area*



The Ogham Grove, Culture Night Belfast 2021

Taking the Cultural Pulse: Sustaining Positive Relationships and Partnerships

Develop and maintain positive relationships with appropriate stakeholders, partners and collaborators e.g. The MAC, UU, St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Circusful, Oh Yeah, Outburst LGBTQ+ Festival, Black Box, contributing to a smooth running, effective cultural infrastructure in the CQ.

WE WILL:

- *Ensure ongoing and effective communication with stakeholders*
- *Respond effectively to relevant public consultations and conversations*
- *Engage effectively with relevant Government and Public Sector entities*
- *Promote the uniqueness of CQ (The Welcoming Quarter) - inclusive to all*
- *Arts, residents, education, religion, business, heritage, LGBTQ+*



Culture Night Belfast 2020

Building Resilience and Sustainability

Build an effective, resilient and environmentally sustainable organisation .

WE WILL:

- *Ensure the Trust resources are effectively and efficiently planned and managed*
- *Work to optimise resources in pursuit of the Trust's core aims*
- *Ensure the Trust advocates best practice in Environmental Sustainability across all areas of activity*
- *Ensure the governance of the Trust complies with the requirements of the law and good practice including management of risk, statutory and legal stipulations and effective Board oversight*



Arts events by CQ Trust throughout the years

OUR BOARD

- Anne McReynolds, Chair
- Andrew McLean, Treasurer
- Kelly-Anne Collins
- Geraldine Duggan
- David Flinn
- Reverend Stephen Forde
- Mark Hackett
- Jenna Hall
- Professor Duncan Morrow
- Peter Richards
- Sorcha Wolsey

CONTACT US

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Arts events by CQ Trust throughout the years