



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Amey

Rushmere House

46 Cadogan Park

Belfast

BT9GHH

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Please find below our response to the Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed Bridge over the Lagan. This response has been prepared by the South Belfast Partnership Board in consultation with a number of local community, statutory and business groups in South Belfast. In particular, views have been captured and input into the response from a number of local structures, including:

South Belfast Partnership Board – A Board which brings together all sectors – community, statutory, political and private – to strengthen and better target the efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government to tackle the economic, social and environmental problems which affect the most disadvantaged areas of South Belfast.

South Belfast Health and Well-being Forum – In January 2010 the South Belfast Partnership Board established a Health Programme as the issue of health and wellbeing emerged as an area requiring a strategic focus. The programme objective was to encourage a strategic approach to address health inequalities and the promotion of wellbeing across South Belfast as a whole through enabling stakeholders to identify priority issues and develop responses to these issues. To achieve this, a South Belfast Health and Wellbeing Forum were created in August 2010. The members include a wide range of community, voluntary and statutory organisations.

South Belfast Community Support Group – A group consisting of a number of representatives from community and voluntary groups that operate in South Belfast which seeks to represent the collective views of the communities they represent;

Inner South Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to oversee the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the three inner city communities of Donegall Pass, Lower Ormeau and the Markets; and

South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to facilitate the implementation of the Government’s Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the South West Belfast area, which covers Sandy Row, the Village, the mid-Donegall Road and Roden Street.

South Belfast Economic Forum- collectively address the economic well-being of South Belfast, ensuring that all sections of the community benefit from economic and employment opportunities, supporting the growth and success of existing businesses and encouraging new enterprises through the collaboration of key representatives from business, community, public agencies, education and training providers.

The South Belfast Partnership Board would view that the proposed pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Lagan is a major opportunity for this part of the city. It will create connections between the South and East of the city and improve permeability and access for communities to Ormeau Park and the amenities of the City Centre. It is clear that journey times would be decreased for pedestrians and cyclists travelling between the Gasworks, city centre, Ormeau Park and south east of the city. The proposed development would also provide a safer route for users. It should encourage more families and individuals to walk or cycle to work which has a twofold benefit; encouraging better health choices and also decreasing car emissions. These are both prerequisites for meeting targets set out in the Programme for Government 2011-2015.

The SBPB believe the proposed bridge will strengthen the adjacent communities by improving their access to amenities in-so-doing benefitting their quality of life. There have been some concerns around antisocial behaviour becoming more of an issue when the two sides of the Lagan are formally linked. Therefore, we are hopeful that resources including CCTV or similar security providing surveillance across the bridge, increased police (PSNI) and community interaction with antisocial individuals will ameliorate this potential issue. Antisocial behaviour may be in part due the isolation of the walkway particularly after the business day ends. It is believed that the communities that live along the river need to be reconnected and woven into the fabric of the river. It was suggested by community representatives that DRD, DSD & BCC should examine ways in which linkages between the Walkway, River & Communities can be developed.

The Market area currently has no pedestrian connection to the walkway. Providing pedestrian access for the Market area should be prioritised as it would help animate the Walkway and River Lagan after the working day ends. The Donegall Pass area should also have pedestrian access to walkway, but this is restricted by the daily closure of the Gasworks Business gate and communities are of the view that these gates should be removed. The Inner South communities are hopeful that the bridge will be the first step in linking communities to the river walkway. The Bridge over the Lagan project should be linked to wider Lagan investment initiatives such as Belfast City Councils Lagan Corridor Project and the Waterways Ireland proposals. All of these projects should strive to benefit those communities that live along the watercourse and help reverse development activity that has turned its back on a major asset.

In terms of encouraging older people's use of the bridge and surrounding areas which may also be helpful to other user groups, the Health Forum has suggested:

- Clear signs/markers to delineated the cycle section on the bridge is from the walking section e.g. 'cyclists keep to the left', coloured section of path or walking/cycle figures
- A safe crossing point/pedestrian crossing on embankment side near to bridge.
- Some additional seating near to bridge to encourage older people's use of bridge and walking area.

The SBPB have collated specific design and build aspects that should be incorporated in the planning, construction and management of this proposed asset:

- Ensure that if the landing points on either side of the bridge require a slope that the ramps at either side are at a gradient manageable for wheelchair users. This will ensure that the bridge is not only disability friendly but age friendly and pram/family friendly.
- The design of bridge railings should be cognisant of wheelchair users; the height of the rails should allow all users to enjoy views both North and South of the River Lagan.
- Bridge deck surface should include cycling infrastructure and clear marking for pedestrians/cyclists.
- Plans should include more bike docking areas around the site.
- Solar lights could be integrated into the design of the bridge to minimise maintenance.
- Durable anti slip surface on the bridge deck that will also avoid erosion and minimise need for maintenance.
- The River Lagan provides a habitat for many types of wildlife including Otters, Seals, Grey Herons and variety of wildfowl and wading birds. During the construction of the bridge, attempts should be made to minimise disruptions to the biodiversity of the river and surrounding area.
- It is important that the number of litter and dog foul bins at either side of the lagan will be increased to encourage clean walk ways and prevent littering of the river itself.
- There should be due diligence around safety along inland waterways, with provision of sufficient life rings and good practice should be adhered to in terms of maintenance and include frequent risk assessments.

The SBPB would generally be of the view that the proposed structure would provide significant economic benefits to the surrounding communities by encouraging regeneration of marginalised communities and connecting people to the city's resources. It will promote the use of the Ormeau Park and the leisure facilities at the Ozone by considerably reducing walking time from the city centre. We hope that the proposed bridge will help regenerate and bolster the local economy.

We trust that you will use the points raised in this response and we look forward to next stages of the project's development. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the matters raised within this response and you may contact my colleague Emma Campbell on 02890 244 070 or emma.campbell@southbelfast.org if you would like any further information or clarity in relation to this response.

Yours faithfully,

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brieger Arthurs".

Brieger Arthurs

Chief Executive Officer