Key Issues
The specific issues relating to the proposed development from the EIA process were mainly related to the design of the site. The key design objectives aimed to:
- Maintain and enhance the integrity and setting of buildings within the Conservation Areas;
- Retain the Listed Buildings;
- Maintain the historic street pattern whilst increasing connectivity by the creating new streets;
- Developing a landscape strategy which included tree planting and realigning Writer’s Square to address St Anne’s Cathedral more positively;
- Minimising air quality effects from traffic using traffic management measures;
- Using acoustically enhanced glazing, acoustic trickle vents and mechanical ventilation to meet operational noise requirements
- Using flood prevention methods to ensure buildings are resistant to flood waters up to a depth of 600 mm;
- Increasing the building roughness, using canopies and revolving doors and shelter to reduce the effects of wind on pedestrians.

Purpose of the Project
Ramboll was instructed by Project Goat Limited to manage the EIA and prepare an Environmental Statement (ES) to be submitted with as the planning application for the proposed redevelopment of a site known as the Former Royal Exchange, in Belfast City Centre. The application site has been identified as an area requiring regeneration. The proposed development provides an opportunity to bring vacant and derelict buildings on site back into use alongside new development.

Description of the project
The application site extends to approximately 4.68 ha in the centre of Belfast. The application site is currently occupied by residential, restaurant, retail, office and miscellaneous uses with a number of properties currently unoccupied and/or derelict. It is located in Belfast City Centre’s historically significant ‘North East Quarter’ (NEQ). The historic nature of the application site is reflected in its location within the Cathedral Quarter Conservation Area and the presence of two Grade A Listed Buildings, and several other listed buildings, within the application site.
**Description of Development cont.**

A 17th Century ditch included in the Sites and Monuments Record is recorded in the northern part of the application site, in the vicinity of Writer’s Square.

Habitats on site are of limited ecological value and there are no water bodies on site. The River Farset is culverted beneath High Street at the southern boundary of the application site. There are a number of air quality and noise sensitive receptors located in close proximity to the application site including residential properties on Donegall Street, a hotel on Waring Street, the University of Ulster campus on York Street and offices on surrounding streets immediately.

Belfast Lough is located approximately 2.4 km north east of the application site and holds various environmental designations: Inner Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI); Belfast Lough Special Protection Area (SPA); Belfast Lough Ramsar site and Belfast Lough RSPB Reserve. The proposed development would provide mixed land uses including: retail, restaurants, office, residential, hotel and community areas. The application included an energy centre housing a combined heat and power (CHP) unit and four boilers which have been designed with the capacity to serve all elements of the proposed development. The proposals also included improvements to the provision of areas of public realm, tree planting the inclusion of green roofs.

**Lessons Learnt**

Lessons learnt during the course of the project include:

- Understanding all key environmental constraints at an early stage allowed the design to be optimised;
- The importance of consideration of alternatives in site layout to minimise potential environmental impacts;
- The critical role of wind modelling in influencing the design of tall buildings;
- Early engagement with key stakeholders ensured the evolving design addressed concern – this was particularly important for landscape and visual and cultural heritage which were key considerations for Belfast City Council;
- Regular check-ins with the wider EIA team ensured information and design changes were effectively communicated and deadlines met.

**Contact Details**

Case Study Author: Kate Lyon, Senior Consultant

Project Contact Details: Maeve Fryday, Principal, Ramboll

mfryday@ramboll.com

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